Weird Tales

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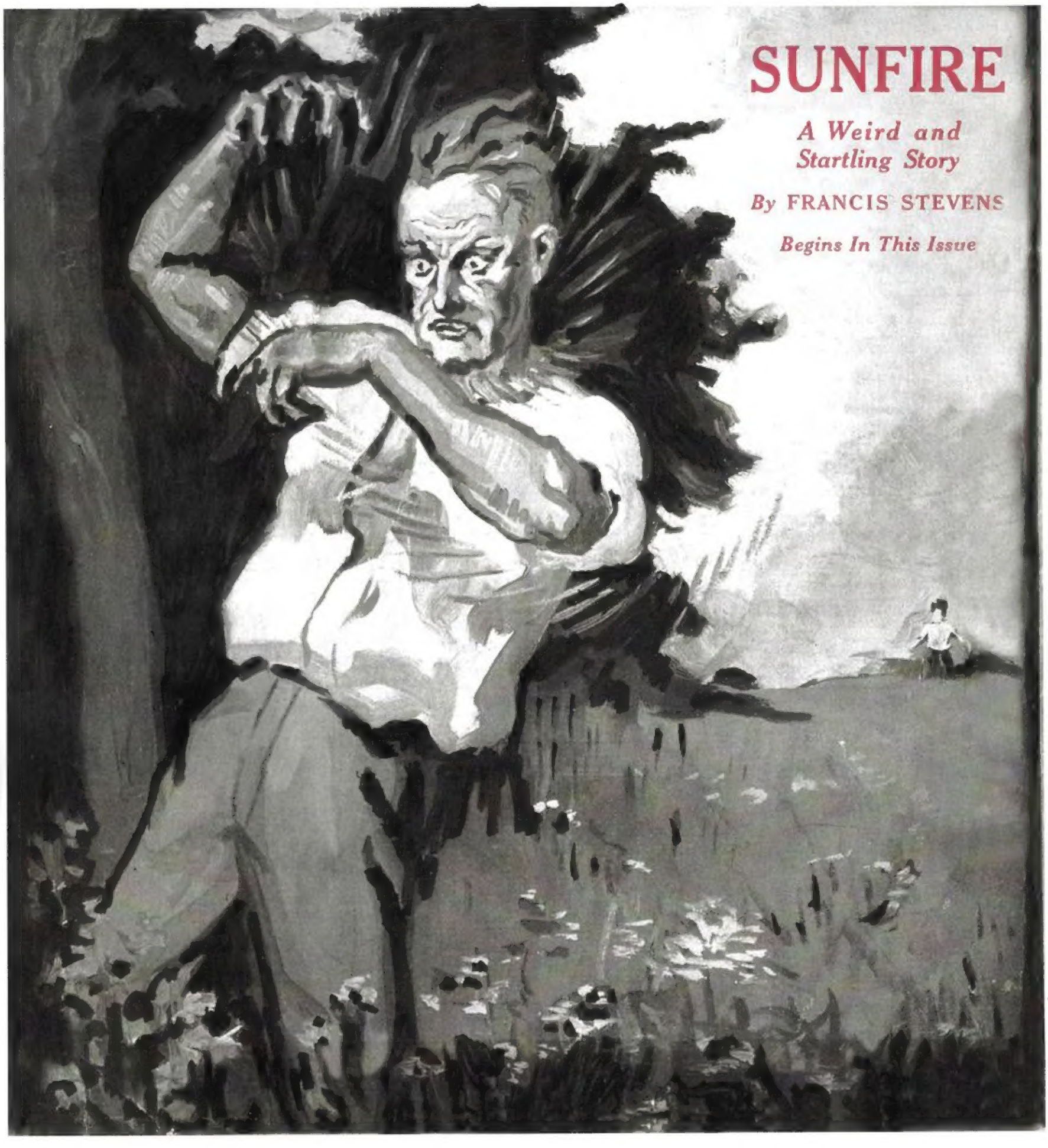

SUNFIRE

A Weird and Startling Story

By FRANCIS STEVENS

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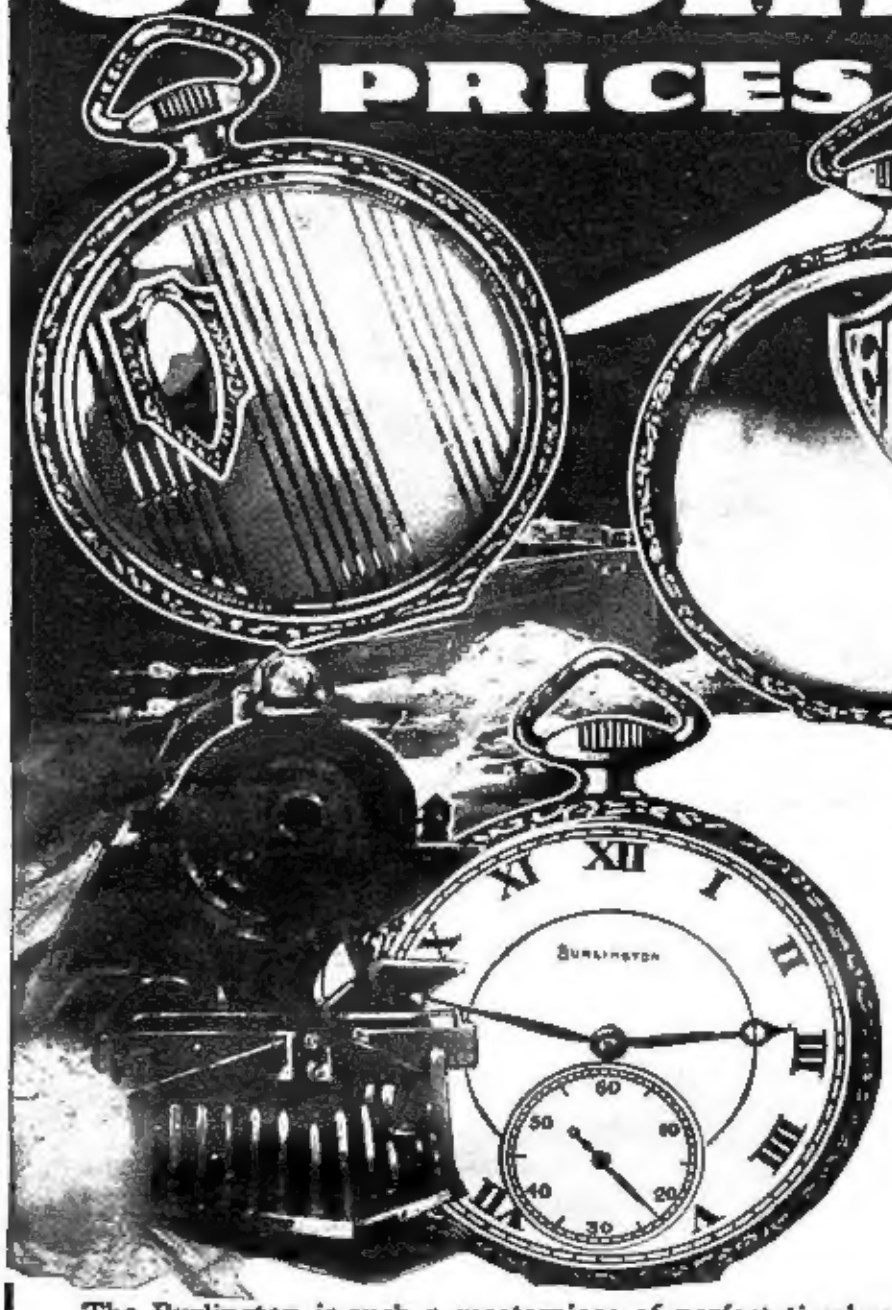

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WEIRD TALES *The Unique Magazine*

EDWIN BAIRD, *Editor*

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The Unique Magazine

WEIRD TALES

Edited by Edwin Baird

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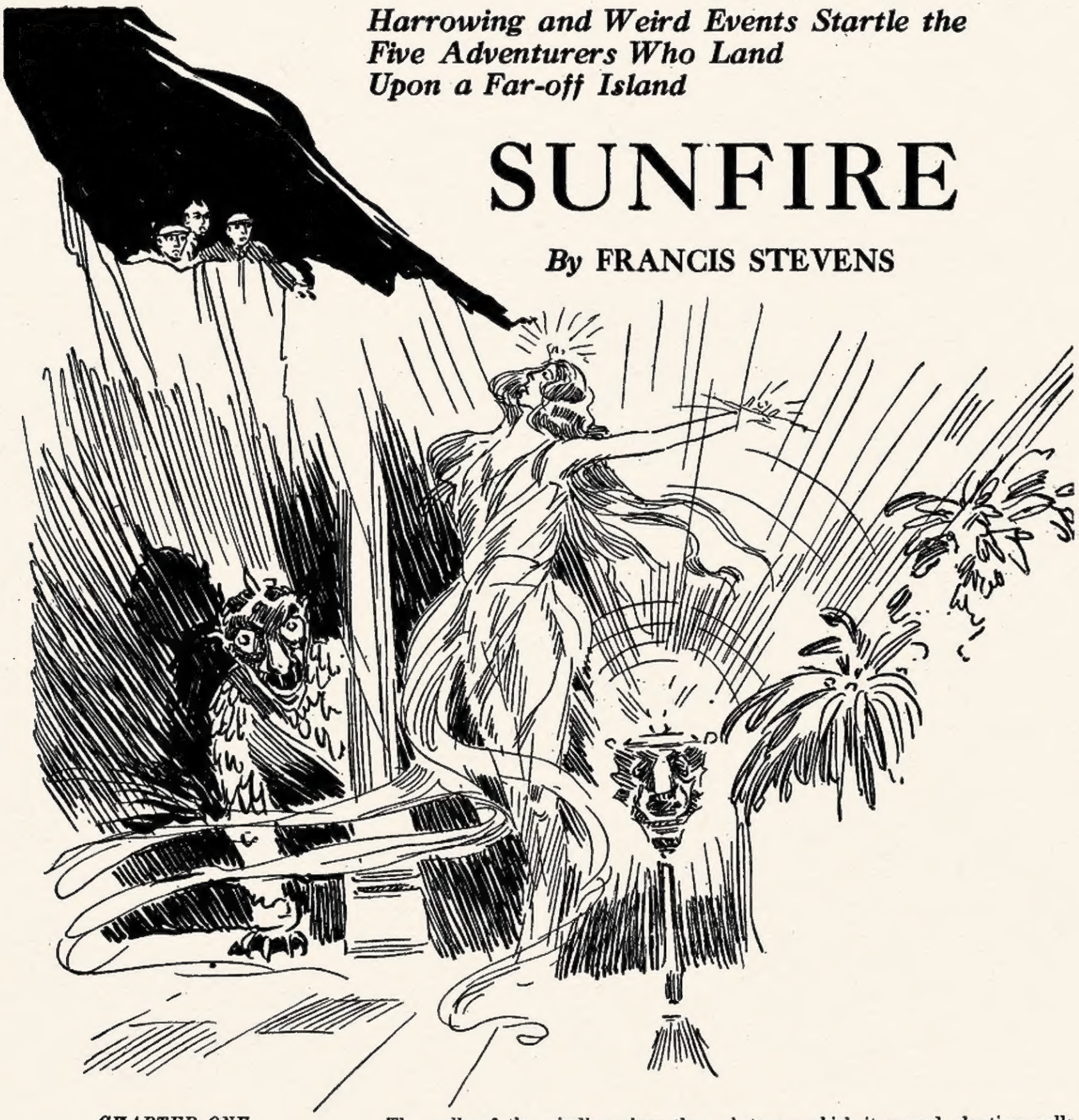
Harrowing and Weird Events Startle the Five Adventurers Who Land Upon a Far-off Island

SUNFIRE

By FRANCIS STEVENS



CHAPTER ONE

THE DERELICT FLEET

IT WAS close to high noon of the fourteenth day since leaving their motor-yacht, when the five men in the traveling canoe had their first view of the island of *"Tata Quarahy,"* Fire of the Sun.

The walls of the winding river they traveled had grown steeper, higher, barren at last of vegetation. The Rio Silencioso, in its lower reaches a fever-ridden, malodorous stream, here flowed in austere purity. Its color was no longer dark, but a peculiar, brilliant hue—like red gold dissolved in crystal. The effect was partly from reflection of the heights between which it wound, slanting walls of rock, stratified in layers of rich color, from pale lemon to a deep red-orange.

The equatorial sun cast its merciless glare over all. The last half-mile of their journey bore a close resemblance to ascending a stream of molten gold flowing through a flaming furnace.

However, the lurid rock walls ended at

last. Poling through a channel too narrow for the sweeplike paddles, they floated out on the lake of the island.

That it was the place told of by their guide, Kuyambira-Petro, there could be no question. But in the first glance it seemed less like a sheet of water with an island in the midst, than an immense flat plate of burnished gold, and, rising out of it—a pyramid of red flame.

"There is a broad water," Petro had said. "There is an island. On the island is a strange power and some stone houses."

Had Kuyambira-Petro been taken to view the wonders of modern New York, his report on returning to his native Moju River village would have been much the same—and about equally descriptive.

Here before them, piled terrace upon terrace, constructed of rock that seemed literally aflame in its sunset colors, towered a monstrous mass of masonry. Even from where the canoe lay they could appreciate the enormous size of those blocks which formed the lower tier.

Surrounding the pyramid at water-level, extended a broad platform of golden-yellow stone. Immediately above that rose a wall, red-orange in color, thirty feet high, without any apparent breach or means of ascent. Set well back from its upper edge were the first tier of Petro's "stone houses."

They were separate buildings, all of like shape, the end walls slanting inward to a flat roof. Eight tiers of these, growing gradually smaller toward the top, completed the pyramid. The whole effect of the ponderous artificial mountain was strangely light and airy.

Above the truncated, eight-sided peak, there seemed to hover a curious nimbus of pale light. In the general glare, however, it was easy to suspect this vague, bright crown of being merely an optical illusion.

On board the canoe, the explorer-naturalist, Bryce Otway, turned a painfully sunburned countenance to Waring, war-correspondent and writer of magazine tales.

"It's there!" he breathed. "It's real! You see it, too, don't you? And, oh! man, man, we'll be the first—think of it, Waring!—the first to carry back photographs and descriptions of *that* to the civilized world!"

"Rather!" Waring grinned. "Take one thing with another, what a story!"

The other three, the young yacht-owner, Sigsbee, the little steward, Johnny Blickensderfer, more often known as John B., and Mr. Theron Narcisse Tellifer, pride of Washington Square in New York City, each after his own fashion agreed with the first speakers.

They had toiled hard and suffered much to reach here. Sigsbee's motor-yacht, the *Wanderer,* they had been forced to leave below the first rapids. The canoe journey had begun with four *caboclos,* half-breed native Brazilians, beside the guide, Petro, to take the labor of paddling.

Every man of these natives had succumbed to beri-beri, inside the first week. The epidemic spared the white men, doubtless because of their living on a different diet than the farina and *chibeh,* or jerked beef, which is the mainstay of native Brazil. Having come so far to solve the mystery of the Rio Silencioso, the five survivors would not turn back.

Rio Silencioso—River of Silence indeed, flowing through a silent jungle-land, where no animal life stirred or howled, where there was only the buzz of myriad stinging insects to heighten rather than break the quiet of the nights. Others before them had tried to conquer the Silencioso. None had ever returned—none, that is, save the old full-blood Indian, Kuyambira-Petro. His story had interested the party of Americans on the *Wanderer,* and, though the guide himself had perished, brought them at last to this strange lake and pyramid.

Reluctantly, merely because even a half-mile of further paddling under the noon sun promised to be suicidal, the heavy stone used for an anchor was dropped to a gravel bottom six feet below. Preparations were made for the mid-day meal and siesta.

From where they lay, the lake appeared as a nearly circular pool, sunk in the heart of this surviving bit of what had once been a great *chapadao,* or plateau, before a few thousand years of wet-season floods had washed most of it down to join the marsh and mire of Amazon Valley. The outlet by which they had entered formed the only break in its shores. It was probably fed by springs from below, accounting for the crystal purity of its waters and the clean gravel of its bottom. Reflected from the shallow depths, the heat proved almost unbearable. Yet no one felt inclined to complain.

"Gehenna in temperature," as Tellifer, the esthete of the party phrased it, "but the loveliness of yon mountain of pyramiding flame atones for all!"

Sprawled in the shade of awning and palm-thatched cabin, they panted, sweated, and waited happily for the hour of release.

Around four-thirty came a breeze like the breath of heaven. The waters of the lake stirred in smooth, molten ripples. Across them moved a canoe-load of eager optimists. The vague haze of white glare that had seemed for a time to hover above the pyramid had vanished with the passing of the worser heat.

On the side which faced the river outlet, the thirty-foot wall, which formed the first tier, boasted neither gateway nor stair. Since it seemed likely that the ancient builders had provided some means of ascent more convenient than ropes or ladders, the canoe turned and circled the pyramid's base.

On closer view, the flame-colored wall proved to be a mass of bas-relief carved work. In execution, it bore that same resemblance to Egyptian art which marks much work of the ancient South and Central American civilizations. The human figures were both male and female, the men nude, bearing platters of fruit and wine-jars, the women clad in single garments hanging from the shoulders. The men marched, but the women were presented in attitudes of ceremonial dance; also as musicians, playing upon instruments resembling Pan's pipes of several reeds.

As Tellifer remarked, it seemed a pity to have spoiled what would otherwise have been a really charming votive procession, by the introduction of certain other and monstrous forms that writhed and twined along the background, and, in some cases, actually wreathed the dancers' bodies.

"Sun-worshippers!" scoffed Waring, referring to a surmise of Otway's regarding the probable religion of the pyramid's builders. "Centipede worshippers—hundred-legger devotees—or do my eyes deceive me? Hey, Otway! What price sun-worship now?"

"Don't bother me!" Otway's voice drifted back happily from the prow. "I'm in the land of undared dreams come true."

Part way around, in that plane of its eight-sided form which faced the west, they found what they were seeking. It was a stairway, fully a hundred feet wide at the base, leading from water-level to the very height of the pyramid, with broad landings at each tier. Where its lowest tread was lipped by the lake, enormous piers of carved stone guarded the entrance. It was a stair of gorgeous coloring and Cyclopean proportion. Its grandeur and welcome invitation to ascend should have roused the exploring party to even greater jubilance.

Strangely, however, none of them at first gave more than a passing glance to this triumph of long-dead builders. In rounding the pyramid, indeed, they had

come upon a sight more startling—in a way—than even the pyramid itself.

Drawn up near the foot of the stair floated a great collection of boats. They ranged in size from a small native dug-out to a cabined traveling canoe even larger than Otway's; in age, from a rotting, half-waterlogged condition that told of exposure through many a long, wet season, to the comparative neatness of one craft whose owners might have left it moored there a month ago at latest.

These, however, were by no means the whole of the marvel.

Over beyond the small fleet of deserted river-craft, floating placidly on buoyant pontoons, rested a large, gray-painted, highly modern hydro-airplane!

CHAPTER TWO

TO THE RESCUE

"THE BOATS," Otway was saying, "are a collection of many years' standing. We have to face the fact that we are not the first to reach this lake, and that, save for Kuyambira-Petro, not one of all those who preceded us has returned down that noble stairway, after ascending it. And that airplane! It has certainly not been here long. The gas in its tanks is unevaporated. Its motors are in perfect order. There is no reason why the man, or men, who came here in it should not have left in the same way—were they alive or free to do so!"

Otway, Alcot Waring and young Sigsbee stood together inside the doorway of one of the buildings in the pyramid's first terrace. The other two, Tellifer and John B., were still on board the canoe, drawn up among the derelict fleet at the landing stage.

Otway had demanded a scouting party, before landing his entire force. Though the war-correspondent and Sigsbee had insisted on sharing the reconnaissance, Tellifer had consented to remain as rear-guard on the canoe, with the steward.

Ascending the stairs, the three scouts had turned at the first terrace and entered the building at the right. As they were on the eastern side of the pyramid, and the sun was sinking, the interior was very dim and shadowy. Enough light, however, was reflected through the tall doorway and the pair of windows to let them see well enough, as their eyes grew used to the duskiness.

They had entered a large room or chamber, in shape a square, truncated pyramid, twenty-five feet high, thirty-five in length and breadth. The floor was bare, grooved and hollowed through long usage by many feet. Around its inner walls ran a stone bench, broken at the back by an eight-foot recess. Therein, on a platform of stone slightly higher than the floor, a black jaguar-hide lay in a tumbled heap.

The hide was old and ragged. Its short, rich fur was worn off in many bald spots. Near the niche, or bed-place, a water jar of smooth clay, painted in red and yellow patterns, lay on its side as if knocked over by a hastily rising sleeper.

The walls were covered by hangings, woven of fiber and dyed in the same garish hues as the water-jar. In lifting the jaguar hide, a girdle composed of golden disks joined by fine chains dropped to the floor. The softly tanned hide itself, though worn and shabby, bore all around its edge a tinkling fringe of golden disks. Like those of the girdle, they were each adorned with an embossed hemisphere, from which short, straight lines radiated to the circumference. A crude representation of the sun, perhaps.

"Or free?" Waring inflected, repeating the naturalist's last words.

Bryce Otway flung out his hands in a meaning gesture.

"Or free!" he reiterated. "Man, look about you. These woven wall-hangings are old, but by no means ancient. In this climate, the palm-fiber and grass of which they are made would have rotted in far less than half a century. The animal that wore this black fur was roaming the jungle alive, not more than ten years ago. The golden ornaments—the painted pottery—they, indeed, might be coeval with the stones themselves and still appear fresh; but fabric and fur—Why, you must understand what I mean. You must already have made the same inference. This pyramid has been inhabited by living people within recent years. And if recently—why not now?"

"I say!" Sigsbee ejaculated. "What a perfectly gorgeous thing it would be, if you are right! If you are, then the fellows that came in the airplane are probably prisoners. I suggest we move right along upward—to the rescue. There are five of us. Every darn one knows the butt of his gun from the muzzle, and then some. If there are any left-overs of a race that ought to be dead and isn't hanging around here, strafing harmless callers, they'll find us one tough handful to exterminate. Come on! I want to know what's on the big flat top of this gaudy old rock-pile!"

Otway's eyes questioned the correspondent.

"Your party," Waring assured. "Agree on a leader—stick to him. But I think Sig's right. That airplane—mighty recent. Something doggone queer in the whole business. Got to be careful. And yet—well, I'd hate to find those fellows later—maybe just an hour or so *too* late."

To Sigsbee's frank joy, the explorer smiled suddenly and nodded.

"I want to go on up," he admitted. "But I hesitated to make the suggestion. Petro didn't tell us of any people living here. There's no knowing, though, exactly what Petro really found."

Fifteen minutes later the entire party of five, rifles at ready, pistols loose in their holsters, advanced upon the conquest of the pyramid.

The great stairway led straight to the top. For some reason, connected perhaps with the hazy glare that had seemed to hover over it at noontime, every man of the five was convinced that both the danger and the solution of the mystery waited at the stairway's head, rather than in any of the silent buildings that stared outward with their dark little windows and doorways like so many empty eye-sockets and gaping mouths.

Ahead, at his own insistence, marched Alcot Waring. A vast mountain of flesh the correspondent appeared, obese, freckle-faced, with small, round, very bright and clear gray eyes. He carried his huge weight up the stairs with the noiseless ease of a wild elephant moving through the jungle.

Just behind him, as the party's next best rifle-marksman, came the steward. John B. was a quiet little man, with doglike brown eyes, gentle manners, and a fund of simply-told reminiscence that covered experiences ranging almost from pole to pole.

Otway, the widely famed naturalist-explorer, peering through round, shell-rimmed spectacles set on a face almost equally round and generally beaming with cheerfulness, walked beside young Sigsbee, whose life, before the present expedition, had been rather empty of adventure, but who was ready to welcome anything in that line.

Last, Mr. Theron Narcisse Tellifer brought up the rear, not, let it be said, from caution, but because his enjoyment of the view across the lake had delayed him. Tall, lank-limbed, he kept his somber, rather melancholy countenance twisted over one shoulder, looking backward with far more interest in the color of lake and sky than in any possible adventure that might await them. It required a good deal of experience with Tellifer to learn why his intimates used his initials as a nickname for him, and considered it appropriate.

So, in loose formation, the party essayed the final stage of that journey which all those who left their boats to rot at the stairfoot had courageously pursued.

The sun was dropping swiftly now behind the western cliffs. The vast shadow of the pyramid extended across the eastern half of the lake and darkened the shores beyond. The stairway was swallowed in a rapidly deepening twilight.

CHAPTER THREE

SCOLOPENDRA HORRIBILIS

THE FIRST real testimony the five received that they were indeed not alone upon the artificial island of rock came on the wings of a sound.

It was very faint, barely audible at first. But it soon grew to a poignant, throbbing intensity.

It was a sound like the piping of flutes—a duet of flutes, weaving a strange monotonous melody, all in a single octave and minor key. The rhythm varied, now slow, now fast. The melody repeated its few monotonous bars indefinitely.

The source of the sound was hard to place. At one moment it seemed to drift down from the air above them. At another, they could have sworn that it issued from or through the stair itself.

They all paused uncertainly. The abruptness of a tropical sunset had ended the last of the day. Great stars throbbed out in a blue-black sky. The breeze had increased to a chill wind. All the pyramid was a mass of darkness about them, save that above the flat peak there seemed again to hover a faint, pale luminescence.

"Shall we go on?"

Instinctively, Otway put the question in a whisper, though, save for the quaint fluting sound, there was no sign of life about them.

Out of the dark, Tellifer answered, a shiver of nervous laughter in his voice:

"Can we go back? The strange thing that has drawn so many hither is calling from the heart of the pyramid. It is—"

"I say, go on," counseled Waring, not heeding him. "Find out what's up there."

"Oh, come along," Sigsbee urged impatiently. "We can go up softly. We've got to find out what we're in for."

Softly they did go, or as much so as was allowed by a darkness in which the "hand before the face" test failed completely. They had brought a lantern with them, but dared not light it. Even intermittent aid from pocket flashes was ruled out by Otway. Unseen enemies, he reminded, might be ambushed in any of the buildings to right and left.

The stairs, narrower toward the top, were also more uneven. They were broken in places, causing many stumbles and hushed curses. Once, Waring observed in a bitter whisper that the party would have formed an ideal squad for scouting duty across No Man's Land; they would have drawn the fire and located the position of every Boche in the sector.

Next moment Waring caught his own foot in a broken gap. The rattle of equipment and crackle of profanity with which he landed on hands and knees, avenged the victims of his criticism. In spite of mysterious perils, smothered laughter was heard upon the pyramid.

Yet none of these indiscretions or accidents brought attack from any quarter. The monotonous fluting continued. As they neared the top, its poignant obligato to their approach grew ever more piercing and distinct.

The final half dozen steps were reached at last. A bare two yards wide, they sloped up with sudden steepness.

Halting the party, breathlessly silent now, Otway himself crept up this last flight. From below, his companions saw his head rise, barely visible against the ghost of white luminance that crowned the pyramid. His entire figure followed it, wriggling forward, belly-flat to the surface.

After a long five minutes, they saw him again, this time standing upright. He seemed, as nearly as they could make out, to be beckoning them on. Then he had once more vanished.

Some question entered the minds of all, whether the beckoning figure had been really that of Otway, or some being or person less friendly. With a very eerie and doubtful sensation, they crept up the narrow flight and over the edge.

Waring was first. He found himself on a broad, flat platform, or rim of stone. At its inner edge a crouching figure showed against the white glow, now appearing much brighter, flooding up from an open space at the center of the peak.

Certain at last that the figure was Otway's, the correspondent catfooted to his side. Over the other's shoulder he looked downward. Then, with a hissing intake of breath, he sank to his knees. Supporting himself with hands on his rifle, laid along the stone rim, he continued to stare downward.

One by one, the others joined the first pair. Very soon, a row of five sun-bronzed, fascinated faces was peering down into the hollow heart of the pyramid.

The eight-sided top consisted of a broad rim surrounding an open space, some hundred and fifty feet across and a third of that in depth. From the point where they knelt, an inner stairway, set at an angle to the eastern plane of the pyramid, led steeply to the bottom of the hollow.

In effect, the place was rather like a garden. On all sides fruit trees, flowering shrubs and palms of the smaller, more graceful varieties, grew out of soil banked off from a central court by a low parapet of yellow stone. It was not the garden effect, however, which had paralyzed the watchers.

Their eyes were fixed upon two forms, circling in a strange, rhythmic dance around a great, radiant, whitely glowing thing, that rested on a circle of eight slender pillars in the middle of the lower court.

One of the forms was that of a woman. Her hair, falling to a little below the shoulders, tossed wildly, a curling, fluffy mass of reddish gold. Arms, legs and feet were bare. A single garment of spotted jaguar hide was draped from shoulders to mid-thigh. For ornament she wore neither bracelets nor anklets, but the jaguar skin was fastened with golden chains and fringed with tiny gold bangles. Upon the red-gold hair a circlet of star-like gems flashed in prismatic glory.

To her lips the woman held a small instrument like a Pan's pipe of golden reeds. It was her playing upon this that produced the double fluting sound.

Her dancing partner was a literal embodiment of the great demon, Terror. Its exact length was impossible to estimate. Numberless talon-like feet carried it through the dance figures with a swiftness that bewildered the eye.

The thing had the general shape of a mighty serpent. But instead of a barrel-like body and scaly skin, it was made up of short, flat segments, sandy yellow in color, every segment graced—or damned—with a pair of frightful talons, dagger-pointed, curved, murderous. At times the monstrous, bleached-yellow length seemed to cover half the floor in a veritable pattern of fleeing segments. Again its fore part would rise, spiraling, the awful head poising high above the woman's.

At such moments it seemed that by merely straightening up a trifle higher, the demonish thing might confront its audience on the upper rim, eye to eye. For, eyes the thing possessed, though it was faceless. Two enormous yellow discs, they were, with neither retina or pupil, set in a curved, polished plate of bone-like substance. Above them a pair of

whip-like, yard-long antennae lashed the air. Below the plate, four huge mandibles, that gnashed together with a dry, clashing sound, took the place of a mouth. During one of these upheavals, the head would sway and twist, giving an obviously false impression of blindness Then down it would flash, once more to encircle the woman's feet in loathsome patterns.

Not once, however, did the strange pair come in actual contact. Indifferent to her partner's perilous qualities, the woman pirouetted, posed, leaped among the coils, her bare feet falling daintily, always in clear spaces. The partner, in turn, however closely flashing by, kept its talons from grazing her garments, her flying hair, or smooth, gleaming white flesh.

The general trend of the dance was in a circle about the luminous mass on the central pillars.

"Chilopoda!" a voice muttered, at last. *"Chilopoda Scolopendra! Chilopoda Scolopendra Horribilis!"*

It sounded like a mystic incantation, very suitable to the occasion. But it was only the naturalist, Bryce Otway, classifying the most remarkable specimen he had ever encountered.

"Chilo-which? It's a nightmare—horrible!" This from Waring.

It remained for John B. to supply a more leisurely identification, made quite in his usual slow, mild drawl:

"When I was steward on the *Southern Queen,* 'Frisco to Valparaiso," said he, "Bill Flannigan, the second engineer, told me that one time in Ecuador he saw one of those things a foot and a half long. Bill Flannigan was a little careless what he said, and I didn't rightly believe him—then. Reckon maybe he was telling the truth after all. Centipede! Well, I didn't think those things ever grew this big. Real curious to look at, don't you think, Mr. Sigsbee?"

Young Mr. Sigsbee made no answer.

What with the soft, glowing radiance of the central object on its pillars, the coiling involutions of one dancer, the never-ceasing gyrations of the other, it was a dizzying scene to look down upon.

That was probably why Tellifer surprised every one by interrupting the dance in a highly spectacular manner.

His descent began with a faint sound as of something slipping on smooth stone. This was followed by a short, sharp shriek. Then, twenty feet below the rim, the willowlike plumes of a group of slender assai palms swished wildly. Came a splintering crack—a dull thud— and "TNT" had arrived at the lower level.

It was a long drop. Fortunately, the esthete had brought down with him the entire crest of one of the assai palms. Between the springy bending of its trunk before breaking, and the buffer effect of the thick whorl of green plumes between himself and the pavement, Tellifer had escaped serious injury.

The men on the rim saw him disentangle himself from the palm-crest and crawl lamely to his feet.

The girl, only a short distance off, ceased to gyrate. The golden Pan's pipes left her lips. With cessation of the fluting melody, the dry clashing of monstrous coils had also ceased. But in a moment that fainter, more dreadful sound began again.

Up over Tellifer's horrified head reared another head, frightful, polished, with dull, enormous yellow eyes—below them four awful mandibles, stretched wide in avid anticipation.

Tellifer shrieked again, and dodged futilely.

CHAPTER FOUR

"SUNFIRE"

TWO OF THE men left on the pyramid's inner rim were expert marksmen. The heavy, hollow-nosed express bullets from four rifles, all in more or less able hands, all trained upon an object several times larger than a man's head, at a range of only a dozen yards or so, should have blown that object to shattered bits of yellow shell and centipedish brain-matter in the first volley.

John B. was heard later to protest that in spite of the bad shooting light and the downward angle, he really could not have missed at that range—as, indeed, he probably did not. Some, at least, of the bullets fired must have passed through the space which the monstrous head had occupied at the moment when the first trigger was pulled.

But *Scolopendra Horribilis,* in spite of his awesome size, proved to have a speed like that of the hunting spider, at which a man may shoot with a pistol all day, at a one-yard range, and never score a bull's-eye.

One moment, there was Tellifer, half-crouched, empty hands outspread, face tipped back in horrified contemplation of the fate that loomed over him. There was the girl, a little way off, poised in the daintiest attitude of startled wonder. And there, coiling around and between them, and at the same time rearing well above them, was that incredible length of yellow plates, curved talons and deadly poison fangs.

From the pyramid's rim four rifles spoke in a crashing volley. Across the open level below, something that might have been a long, yellowish blur—or an optical illusion—flashed and was gone.

There was still the girl. There was Tellifer. But *Scolopendra Horribilis* had vanished like the figment of a dream. One instant he was there. The next he was not. And well indeed it was for those who had fired on him that retreat had been his choice!

At the western side of the court was a round, black opening in the floor, like a large manhole. Down this hole the yellowish "optical illusion" had flashed and vanished.

As the crashing echoes of the volley died away, the girl roused from her air of tranced wonderment. She showed no inclination to follow her companion in flight. Judged by her manner, powder-flash and ricocheting bullets held no more terrors for her than had the hideous poison fangs of her recent dancing partner.

She tilted her head, coolly viewed the dim figures ranged along the eastern rim. Then, light as a blown leaf on her bare feet, she flitted toward her nearest visitor, Tellifer.

From above, Waring shouted at the latter to come up. Unless the girl were alone in the pyramid, the volley of rifle-fire must surely bring her fellow-inhabitants on the scene. Worse, the monster which had vanished down the black hole might return.

These perils, Waring phrased in a few forceful words. Seeing that, instead of heeding him, Tellifer was pausing to exchange a friendly greeting with the priestess of this devil's den, Waring added several more, this time extremely forceful words.

Their only effect was to draw another brief upward glance from the girl. Also, what seemed to be a shocked protest from Tellifer. The latter's voice did not carry so well as his friend's. Only a few phrases reached those on the upper rim.

"Alcot, please!" was distinct enough, but some reference to a "Blessed Damozel" and the "seven stars in her hair" was largely lost. At best, it could hardly have been of a practical nature.

The big correspondent lost all patience with his unreckonable friend.

"That—fool!" he choked. "Stay here, you fellows. I'm going after TNT!"

And Waring in turn undertook the final stage of that long journey which so many others had followed, leading to the heart of this ancient pyramid.

The five adventurers had the testimony of the pitiful fleet of derelicts at the landing stage that the pyramid had a way of welcoming the coming, but neglecting to speed its departing guests.

They had seen the frightful companion of this girl.

And yet when Waring, breathing wrath against his friend, reached the lower level, he did not hale Tellifer violently thence, as he had intended. Instead, those still above saw him come to an abrupt halt. After a moment, they saw him remove his hat. They watched him advance the rest of the way at a gait which somehow suggested embarrassment—even chastened meekness.

"Mr Waring is shaking hands with her now," commented John B. with mild interest.

"This is madness!" Otway's voice in turn was raised in a protesting shout. "Waring! Oh, Waring! Don't forget that hundred-legger! Well, by George! You two stay here. I'll run down and make that pair of lunatics realize—"

The explorer's voice, unnaturally harsh with anxiety, died away down the inner stair.

"If they think," said Sigsbee indignantly, "that I'm going to be left out of every single interesting thing that comes along—"

The balance of his protest, also, was lost down the inner stair.

John B. offered no reasons for his own descent. Being the last to go, he had no one to offer them to. But even a man of the widest experience may yield to the human instinct and "follow the crowd."

When the steward reached the center of attraction at the lower level, his sense of fitness kept him from thrusting in and claiming a handclasp of welcome, like that which had just been bestowed on his young employer. But he, too, respectfully removed his hat. He also neglected to urge the retreat which would really have been most wise.

The trouble was, as Sigsbee afterward complained, she was such a surprising sort of girl to meet in the heart of an ancient pyramid, dancing with an incredible length of centipede! Some bronzed Amazon with wild black eyes and snaky locks would have seemed not only suitable to the place, but far easier either to retreat from or hale away as a hostage.

This girl's eyes were large, a trifle mournful. Their color was a dusky shade of blue, the hue of a summer sky to eastward just at the prophetic moment before dawn. The men who had come down into her domain made no haste away. Moreover, the need for doing so seemed suddenly remote; almost trivial, in fact. The face framed in that red-gold glory of hair, crowned with stars, was impossible to associate with evil.

By the time Otway had reached the scene, however, and received his first startled knowledge that references to a "Blessed Damozel" were less out-of-place than they had seemed from above, Waring had recovered enough to laugh a little.

"Otway," he greeted, "priestess of the ancient sun-worship—centipede worship—some sort of weird religion—wants to make your acquaintance! You're the local linguist. Know any scraps of pre-Adamite dialect likely to fit the occasion?"

The explorer, too, had accepted the welcoming hand and looked into the dawn-blue eyes. He drew a long breath—shook his head over Waring's question.

"I'll try her in Tupi and some of the dialects. But this is no Indian girl. Can't you see, Waring? She's pure Caucasian. Of either Anglo-Saxon or French blood, by those eyes and that hair. Perhaps a trace of Irish. The nose and—"

"For Heaven's sake! Stop discussing her in that outrageous way," urged young Sigsbee, who had fallen victim without a struggle. "I believe she understands every word you're saying."

There was a brief, embarrassed pause. Certainly the grave, sweet smile and the light in the dusky eyes had for an instant seemed very intelligent.

But when Waring spoke to her again, asking if she spoke English, the girl made no reply nor sign that she understood him. Otway made a similar attempt, phrasing his question in Portuguese, Tupi—universal trade language of Brazil—and several Indian dialects. All to no avail. French, Italian and German, resorted to in desperation, all produced a negative result. The resources of the five seemed exhausted, when Tellifer added his quota in the shape of a few sounding phrases of ancient Greek.

At that the sweet, grave smile grew more pathetic. As if deprecating her inability to understand, the girl drew back a little. She made a graceful gesture with her slim, white arms—and fled lightly away around the central pillars.

"Greek!" snorted Waring. "Think the Rio Silencioso is the Hellespont, Tellifer? You've frightened her away!"

The esthete defended himself indignantly. "It was an invocation to Psyche! Your frightful German verbs were the—"

"Gentlemen, we are playing the fool with a vengeance! She's gone to call that monstrous hundred-legger up again!"

"Beg pardon, Mr. Otway, but you're wrong." John B. had unassumingly moved after the lady. He called back his correction from a viewpoint commanding the western side: "She's only closing the hole where it went down—and now she's coming back."

With needless heat, Sigsbee flung out an opinion:

"You fellows make me tired! As if a girl like that would be capable of bringing harm to anyone, particularly to people she had just shaken hands with and—and—"

"Smiled upon," Waring finished for him heartlessly. "Otway's right, Sig. Playing the fool. And we aren't all boys. Queer place. Too almighty queer! Woman may be planning anything. We must compel her to—There she goes! Bring the whole tribe out on us, I'll bet!"

"Beg pardon, Mr. Waring." John B. was still keeping the subject of discussion well in view. She had disappeared, this time into one of several clear lanes in the banked-off shrubbery that led from the central space toward the walls. "I don't think the young lady means to call anyone, sir. She's coming back again."

As he spoke, the girl reappeared. In her slim hands she bore a traylike receptacle made of woven reeds and piled high with ripe mangoes, bananas and fine white guava-fruits.

Here was a situation in which the most unassuming of yacht-stewards could take part without thrusting himself unduly forward. When John B.'s young employer beat him to it by a yard and himself gallantly took the heavy tray from their hostess, John B. looked almost actively resentful.

Sigsbee returned, triumphant. The tray was in his hands and the girl of dawn-blue eyes drifted light as a cloud beside him.

"If anyone dares suggest that she's trying to poison us with this fruit," he said forcefully, "that person will have me to deal with!"

"Cut it, Sig. Matter of common sense. Know nothing about the girl."

Waring broke off abruptly. A selection of several of the finer fruits was being extended to him in two delicate hands. For some reason, as the girl's glance met his across the offering, the big correspondent's freckled face colored deeply. He muttered something that sounded remarkably like, "Beg pardon!" and hastily accepted the offering.

"'Her eyes,'" observed Tellifer, absently, "'were deeper than the depth of waters stilled at even'."

"Cut it, Tellifer! Please. Girl's a mere child. Can't hurt a child by re-

fusing a pretty, innocent little gift like this fruit."

"She means us no harm," Otway came to his rescue firmly. "As you say, Waring, the girl is a mere child. She has never willfully harmed anyone. God knows what her history has been—a white child brought up by some lingering, probably degenerate members of the race that built this place. But clearly she has been educated as a priestess or votary in their religion. The fresco below, you'll recall, represents a votive procession with women dancers, dressed like this one, playing upon Pan's pipes, with the forms of monster centi—"

"Don't!" Young Sigsbee's boyish voice sounded keenly distressed. He had set down the tray and was reverently receiving from the girl his share of the fruit. "What we saw from the upper rim was illusion—nightmare! *This* girl never danced with any such horrible monster."

"TNT!"

The exclamation, shout rather, came from Waring. Under the glance of those dawn-blue eyes, the correspondent had been trying to devour a mango gracefully—an impossible feat—when he observed Tellifer strolling over toward the central pillars. That great, glowing, white mass which they supported was of a nature unexplained. Waring, at least, still retained enough discretion to be deeply suspicious of it.

"Come back here!" he called. "We don't know what that thing is, Tellifer. May be dangerous."

The esthete might have been stone-deaf, for all the attention he gave. As he approached closer to the glowing thing, the others saw his pace grow swifter—saw his arms rise in a strange, almost worshipping gesture.

And next instant they saw him disappear, with the suddenness of a Harlequin vanishing through a trap in an old-fashioned pantomime.

A portion of the stone floor had tipped up under his weight, flinging him forward and down. They saw him slide helplessly into what seemed to be an open space of unknown depth which the eight pillars surrounded.

A faint cry was wafted up from the treacherous pit. Then silence.

Flinging the dripping mango aside, Waring dashed across the floor. The other three were close at his heels.

Unlike the massive construction of all other parts of the pyramid, the eight pillars were slender, graceful shafts of sunset-hued stone. Rising some dozen feet above the pavement, they were placed at the angles of an eight-sided pit, or opening.

The exact shape of the shining mass these pillars supported was more difficult to determine. Its own light melted all its outlines in a soft glory of pale radiance. The light was not dazzling, however. Drawing near to the thing, it appeared more definite. The lower surface, slightly convex, rested at the edges on the tops of the eight pillars. Rising from the eight-sided circumference, many smaller planes, triangular in form, curved upward to the general shape of a hemisphere.

The light of the mass issued from within itself, like that of a great lamp, except that there seemed to be no central brightest point, or focus. Looking at any portion, the vision was somehow aware that the entire mass was lucidly transparent. And yet so transfused with radiance was it that the eye could pierce but a little way beyond the outer surfaces.

Even in that excited moment, Waring had an odd, fleeting conviction that somewhere, sometime he had looked upon an object similar to this.

" 'Ware the edge," he called to his companions—and himself approached it with seeming recklessness.

He was more cautious than he appeared. There were sixteen stones in the pavement around the pillars. Eight of them were pentagonal in shape, the points laid outward. These large slabs alternated with narrow oblong blocks, each based against one of the square pillars, radiating like wheel-spokes. The large slab that had thrown Tellifer might be the only treacherous one, or all the pentagonal blocks might be pivoted beneath. Should the spokelike oblongs drop, however, any one of them would fling its victim against one of the pillars, instead of into the pit.

Waring did not stop to think this out. He merely instinctively assumed that the spokelike stones were comparatively safe. Running to the inner end of one of them, he flung his arm about the pillar and bent forward, peering into the pit.

His companions had paused a little way behind him. They all knew what a really deep regard had existed between the big correspondent and the eccentric esthete. There was something pitifully tragic in seeing that great bulk of a man poised there, one arm stiffly outstretched, staring down into the abyss that had engulfed his friend.

They heard him draw a long, quivering sigh. When he spoke, his deep tones noticeably trembled:

"Like it down there? Darn you, TNT! Next time I hear your deathery—stop and smoke a cigar before I charge around any! What's wrong? Lost your voice?"

Respect for tragedy appearing suddenly out of place, the other men followed Waring to the edge.

That is, Otway and John B., having noted the correspondent's path of approach, followed to the edge. Young Sigsbee, less observant, merely avoided the particular slab that had thrown Tellifer. He stepped out on the pentagon next adjoining and took one cautious stride.

The archaic engineers who balanced those slabs had known their business perfectly. The pointed outer ends were bevelled and solidly supported by the main pavement. But the least additional weight on the inner half was enough for the purpose intended. Sigsbee tried in vain to fling himself backward. Failing in that, he sat down and slid off a forty-five degree slope to join Tellifer.

As he disappeared, there came a little, distressed cry—the first sound of any kind which the dancer had uttered. The girl ran out along one of the oblong paths to cling round a pillar and stare down after Sigsbee.

The pit beneath the lucent mass was octagonal at the top, but, below, it curved to a round bowl-shape. Dead-black at the bottom, the upper planes shaded from brown to flame-orange. It was not over a dozen feet deep at the center.

Tellifer, it seemed, had been standing in the middle, arms folded, face thrown back, contemplating the under surface of the shining mass above him with a rapt, ecstatic interest which took no heed of either his predicament or his friend's irritated protest. He had attention for nothing save the lucent mass. When Sigsbee in turn arrived, knocking the esthete's feet from under him, Tellifer emerged from the struggling heap, more indignant at being disturbed, than over his badly kicked shins.

In a moment he had resumed his attitude of entranced contemplation.

Standing ruefully up beside him, Sigsbee answered several eager questions hurled by the others, with an acerbic:

"How do I know? Ask him! I can't see anything up there but a lot of white light that makes my eyes ache. I say, you fellows, won't you throw me a line or something and haul me out? Tellifer can stay here, if he admires the view so much. I can't see anything in it."

He glanced down at his clothes disgustedly—inspected a pair of hands the palms of which were black as any negro's.

"The bottom of this hole," he complained, "is an inch deep in soft soot! What a mess!"

"Soot!" Adjusting his shell-rims, Otway viewed the bottom of the bowl with new interest. "What kind of soot?"

"W-what? Why, black soot, of course. Can't you see? It's all over me, and Tellifer, too—only I don't believe he knows it." The younger man's wrath dissolved in a sudden giggle. "Niggers! Sweeps! Is my face as bad as his?"

"You don't understand," persisted Otway eagerly. "I mean, is it dry, powdery, like the residue of burned wood, or is it—er—greasy soot, as if fat had been burned there? What I'm getting at," he peered owlishly around his own pillar toward Waring's, "is that sacrifices may have been made in this pit. Either animal or human. Probably the latter. I've a notion to fall in there myself and see—"

"Well, you can if you want to, but *help me out!*" Sigsbee gazed in dawning horror at the black stuff coating his hands and clothing. "It *is* greasy! Help me up quick, so I can wash it off!"

"Mustn't be so finicky, Sig," chuckled Waring. "You aren't the burnt offering, anyway. At least, not yet. Hello! What's wrong with our little friend?"

Face buried in her hands, the girl had sunk to a crouching position behind the pillar. Soft, short, gasping sounds came from her throat. Her whole slender body shook in the grip of some emotion.

"Why, she's crying!" said Otway.

"Or laughing." Sigsbee looked from his hands to Tellifer's face. "I don't blame her," he added loyally.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Sigsbee, but the little lady is crying." John B. had quietly left his own post and walked out on the dancer's oblong of safety. "I can see the tears shining between her fingers," he added gravely.

Four helpless males contemplated this phenomenon through a long quarter-minute of shocked silence. Suddenly Otway flung up his hands in a gesture so violent that it nearly hurled him headlong into the pit.

"Gentlemen," he cried desperately, "what *is* this place? Where are the people who must be about it somewhere? Who and what is that girl? *Why* is she crying? And what in the name of heaven is that great thing shining there above a sooty pit surrounded by man-traps?"

It was Tellifer who took up the almost hysterical challenge. He came to life with a long sigh, as of some great decision reached.

"Your last question," he said, "in view of the object's obvious nature, I assume to be purely oratorical. The others are of small importance. I have been deciding a real and momentous question—one the answer to which is destined to be on the lips of men in every quarter of the terrestrial globe, and not for a day or a year of fame, but through centuries of wondering worship! And yet," Tellifer waved a sooty hand in a gesture of graceful deprecation, "with all of what I may term my superior taste and intellect, I have been unable to improve on the work of that primitive but gifted connoisseur, Kuyambira-Petro.

"He has already christened this thing of marvelous loveliness. When he told us of this island he said that there presided here an *anyi*—a spirit—a strange power—and he called it *Tata Quarahy!* We could not understand him. The poor fellow's simple language had not words to describe it further. And yet, how perfectly those two words alone did describe it! *Tata Quarahy!* Sunfire! Why not let the name stand? Could any other be more adequate? 'Sunfire!' Name scintillant of light. Let it be christened 'Sunfire,' that even the fancy of men not blessed to behold it with material eyes, may in fancy capture some hint of a supernal glory. But perhaps," Tellifer glanced with sudden anxiety from face to face of his bewildered companions above him, "perhaps I take too much on myself, and you do not agree?"

"'TNT,'" said Waring desperately, "for just one minute, talk sense. *What is that thing up there*—if you know?"

Tellifer's entranced vision strayed again to the huge bulk that seemed, in its radiant nimbus, to hover above rather than rest on the eight columns.

"I beg your pardon, Alcot," he said simply. "I really believed you knew. The phosphorescent light—the lucent transparency—the divine effulgence that envelopes it like a robe of splendid—Alcot, please! There is a lady present. If you must have it in elementary language, the thing is a diamond, of course!"

CHAPTER FIVE

THE BRONZE LEVER

GETTING the two entrapped ones out of the sooty pit proved fairly easy. The sides of the bowl were smooth, but a couple of leather belts, buckled together and lowered, enabled the men below to walk up the steep curve, catch helping hands and be hauled to the solid paths behind the pillars.

Four of the men then retired from the treacherous ground, and in an excited, disputing group stood off, walked about, and from various viewpoints and distances attempted settling, then and there, whether Tellifer was or was not right in his claim that the enormous glowing mass above the pit was a diamond.

It must be admitted that for quite a time, the girl was forgotten. Only John B. failed to join in that remarkable dispute.

"Half a ton at least!" protested Waring. "Preposterous! Heard of stones big as hen's eggs. But this! Roc's egg! Haroun al Raschid—Sindbad—Arabian Nights! You're dreaming, TNT! *Half a ton!*"

"Oh, very well, Alcot. It is true that I have some knowledge of precious stones, and that in my humble opinion Sunfire is as much a diamond as the Koh-i-noor. But of course, if you assure me that it is not——"

"How many karat is half a ton?" queried Sigsbee. "I say, Tellifer, how about that young mountain for a classy stickpin?"

"I refuse to discuss the matter further!" Tellifer's voice quivered with outraged emotion. "If either of you had the least capacity for reverent wonder, the faintest respect for the divinely beautiful, you would—you would *hate* anyone who spoke flippantly about Sunfire!"

"Gentlemen,"—Otway had dropped out of the discussion as he found its heat increasing—"why not leave deciding all this for a later time? Haven't we rather lost sight of our object in ascending the pyramid? What of those air-men whom we were so eager to rescue?"

Followed a somewhat shamefaced silence. Then the disputants, even Tellifer, agreed that the surprising line of entertainment afforded by the pyramid had indeed shifted their thoughts from a main issue.

"But we haven't seen anybody in need of rescue, so far," defended Sigsbee. "There is no one here but the girl."

"Beg pardon, sir." John B. had at last rejoined the group. In his brown eyes was a sad, mildly thwarted look, somewhat like that in the eyes of a dog left outside on the doorstep. "The young lady isn't here now, sir. After you and Mr. Tellifer climbed out of the pit, she seemed real pleased for a while and stopped crying. I tried talking to her, and I tried eating some of her fruit, but she didn't seem very much interested. And just now she went away. She went," John B. pointed down one of the open lanes, "out through that door and shut it behind her."

The steward paused.

"And bolted it on the other side," he finished sadly.

The four eyed one another. There was mutual scorn in their glances.

"As a rescue party," opined Otway, "we are a fraud. As explorers of a perilous mystery, we are extremely unwise. As diplomats, we are a total loss. There we had a friend from the enemy's ranks who might have been willing to help free the prisoners—if there are any. She was intelligent. We might have communicated with her by signs. Now we have offended the girl by our neglect. If she returns at all, it may be in company with hostile forces."

"We've hurt her feelings!" Sigsbee mourned.

"All too *darn* queer!" reiterated Waring. "Rifle-fire — shouting — produced not a sign of life anywhere—except this girl."

"Of course, she may really be alone here." Removing the shell-rims, Otway polished them thoughtfully. He replaced them to stare again at the radiant mass of "Sunfire."

"Whether that thing is or is not a diamond," he continued, "one can understand Petro's characterizing it as an *anyi*, or spirit. To a mind of that type, the inexplicable is always supernatural. It is obvious, too, that—something or other is frequently burned in that pit. The girl wept because two of us had fallen in! I wonder what manner of horrible sights that poor child has witnessed in this place?"

Again Sigsbee bristled. "Nothing bad that she had any hand in!"

"Did I even hint such a thing?" The explorer's own amiable tone had grown suddenly tart; then he grinned. "Between the questions of 'Is it a diamond?' and 'Why is the girl?' we shall end by going for one another's throats. Suppose that instead of wasting time in surmise, we undertake a tour of inspection. We haven't half looked the place over. There may be other exits than the one our displeased hostess locked behind her. You are sure that it is locked, Blickensderfer?"

John B. nodded. "I heard her slide a bolt across. Besides, I tried it with my shoulder, sir."

"Very well. We'll hunt for other doorways."

Viewed from the central court, the eight walls of the great place were mostly invisible. Though the greatest of the palms were not over thirty feet tall, the radiance of Sunfire was not enough to illuminate the upper heights. The lower walls were hidden by a dense luxuriance of vine-bound foliage.

Following one of the paved lanes cut through this artificial jungle, they discovered that another path circumscribed the entire court, between walls and shrubbery. By the use of their pocket-flashes they learned also that these inner walls were carved with Titan figures like those of the fresco which banded the pyramid's outer base.

The walls were perpendicular. At this level, there must be a considerable space between their inner surface and the outer slope. That it was not a space entirely filled with solid masonry was proved by the fact that at the end of each clear lane was a doorway. These exits, like those of the outer buildings, bore the shape of a truncated triangle.

But, unlike them, they were not open, but blocked by heavy, metal doors, made of bronze or some similar metal. The one through which the girl had passed was set in the southeastern wall. It was indeed fastened.

In circling the boundary path they encountered two more similar doors, one centering the southern wall and one the southwestern, both of which resisted all efforts to push them open. Reaching the western side, however, they found, not one, but eight doors.

These were not only of different construction from the others, but all stood wide open. They faced eight very narrow paths through the greenery, running parallel with one another to the central court. The overarching shrubbery shut out Sunfire's light. But the party's pocket flashes made short work of determining where these eight portals led.

The entire party were rather silent over it, at first. There was something ominous and unpleasant in the discovery.

"Eight prison cells!" said Otway at last. "Eight cells, with chains and manacles of bronze, all empty and all invitingly neat and ready for the next batch of captives. I don't know how you fellows feel about it, but it strikes me we needn't have hurried up here. Our unlucky friends of the air-route are, I fear, beyond need of rescue."

Waring stood in the doorway of one of the empty cells. Again he flashed his light about. It was square, six feet by six at the base, in inner form bearing the shape of a truncated pyramid—save in one particular. The rear wall was missing. On that side the cell was open. A black shaft descended there. That its depth was the depth of the pyramid itself was proved when John B. tossed over the remains of a guava he had been eating. The fruit splashed faintly in water far, far below.

"For the prisoner. Choice between suicide and sacrifice," hazarded the correspondent. "Cheerful place, every way. These leg cuffs have been in recent use, too—not much doubt of that."

The manacles were attached to a heavy chain of the bronzelike metal that in turn was linked to a great metal ring set in the floor. The links were bright in places, as if from being dragged about the floor by impatient feet.

"Suicide!" repeated Otway. "My dear fellow, how could a man fastened up in those things leap into the shaft behind?"

"One on me. Captive of these elephant-chains would certainly do no leaping. These triangular openings in the doors—"

"To admit light, perhaps. More likely to pass in food to the prisoner. But where are the jailers? Why are we allowed to come up, let off our guns at the sacred temple pet, be amiably entertained by the—priestess, or whatever she is, climb in and out of the sacrificial pit, and generally make ourselves at home, without the least attempt at interference?"

"Came on an off night," Waring surmised. "Nobody home but Fido and little Susan."

"Alcot!" Again the esthete's tones sounded deeply injured. "Can your flippancy spare nothing of the lovely mystery——"

But here Waring exploded in a shout of mirth that drowned the protest and echoed irreverently from the ancient carven walls.

"Lovely mystery is right, Tellifer! Lovely idiots, too! Stand about and talk. Stairway fifty yards off. Hole of that hell-beast between stairway and us. Somebody sneak in and let Fido loose again—hm? We can't shoot him. Proved that. Might as well try to hit a radio message, en route."

"But the noise and the flash drove him off," reminded Otway. "Remember, the courage of the invertebrate animals is of a nature entirely different from that of even the reptillia. Friend 'Fido,' as you call him, is after all only an overgrown bug—though I shatter my reputation as a naturalist in misclassifying the *chilopoda* as bugs."

"Oh, can him in the specimen jar later, Professor. Come on around the northern side. Haven't looked that over yet."

"Beg pardon, sir." John B. had strayed on, a little beyond the last of the eight cells. He was examining something set against the wall there. "I wonder what this is meant for? It

looks like some sort of a handle—or lever."

His companions joined him. The steward's discovery was a heavy, straight bar of metal set upright, its lower end vanishing through an open groove in the pavement, standing about the height of a man's shoulder above it.

"It's a switch," asserted Waring gravely. "Electric light switch. Throw it over—bing! Out will go TNT's 'diamond'!"

Battle glinted again in Tellifer's moody eyes.

"It is an upright lever," said he, "intended to move something. Though I make no pretensions to the practical attitude of some others here, I can do better than stand idly ridiculing my friends when there is a simple problem to be solved in an easy and direct manner."

"TNT! I apologize! *Don't!*"

But Tellifer had already grasped the upright bar. He seized it near the top and flung his weight against it. The bar moved, swinging across the groove and at the same time turning in an arc. Where it had been upright, it now slanted at a sharp angle.

"Oh, Lawdy! he's done it! What'll happen now?"

The correspondent's eyes, and those of the others also, roved anxiously about what could be seen of the walls and central court. But their concern over Tellifer's rash act appeared needless. So far as could be seen or heard, throwing over the lever had produced no result.

Tellifer alone was really disappointed.

"Old, ugly, wornout mechanism!" he muttered. And released the lever.

As if in vengeance for Tellifer's slighting remark, the lever flew back to the upright position with a speed and violence which flung the experimenter sprawling. The reversal was accompanied by a dull, heavy crash that shook the very floor beneath their feet.

"That was out in the central court!" shouted Sigsbee. "He's wrecked his 'diamond,' I'll bet!"

"Nonsense! The light is still there."

Waring started along the nearest lane. Then turned back and went to his friend, who had not risen.

"Hurt?" he demanded.

"Only my arm and a few ribs broken and a shoulder out of joint, thank you. But that frightful crashing noise! Alcot, don't tell me that I have destroyed—destroyed Sunfire!"

"No, no. Your diamond's shining away to beat a Tiffany show-window."

"Hey, there, Waring! Throw that lever again, will you?"

Otway's voice hailed from the central court, whither he and Sigsbee and the steward had gone without waiting for the other two. As Tellifer's injuries were not keeping him from getting to his feet, the correspondent turned his attention to the lever.

The bar went over without heavy pressure. After a moment Otway's voice was heard again:

"All right. But let her come up easy!"

Once more Waring complied. He found that by slacking the pressure gradually the bar returned to the upright position without violence. This time no crash occurred at the end. Finding that Tellifer had deserted him, Waring left the switch and followed.

He found the other four all draped around Sunfire's supporting columns, staring down into the pit.

"He cracked the bowl," Otway greeted, "and showed us how the sacrificial remains are disposed of. That lever works the dump!"

Waring had selected his oblong safety-path and joined the observers. He saw that one side of the great stone bowl beneath Sunfire now showed a thin, jagged crevice running from upper edge almost to the bottom.

"Don't understand," frowned Waring.

"I'll work it for you, sir."

The obliging John B. fled to take his turn at the bronze bar. A minute later, Waring saw the whole massive, bowl-shaped pit beneath him shudder, stir, and begin to tip slowly sideways. It continued to tip, revolving as upon an invisible axis. In a few seconds, instead of gazing down into a soot-blackened bowl, he was staring up at a looming hemisphere of flame-orange stone that towered nearly to Sunfire's lower surface, twice the height of a tall man above him.

"Let her down easy, Blickensderfer!" called Otway again. "Afraid of the jolt," he added in explanation. "The remarkable thing is that when Tellifer allowed it to swing back full weight that first time, it didn't smash the surrounding pavement and bring these pillars down. But it merely cracked itself a bit."

Waring gasped. "D'you mean—Did I swing all those tons of rock around with one easy little push on that bar?"

"Seeing is believing," asserted Otway, as the revolving mass turned easily back into place, and they once more looked into a hollow, sooty bowl. "Those ancient engineers knew a lot about leverage. How were the enormous stones of this pyramid brought across the lake and lifted into their places? This bowl is somehow mounted at the sides like a smelting pot on bars that pass beneath the pavement. That pavement, by the way," and the explorer cast an eager eye across the space between the pit and the western wall, "will have to come up. Uncovering the mechanism which operates this device may give some wonderful pointers to our modern engineers."

"But what's it *for?*" pleaded Waring.

"Why, you saw the black depths under the bowl. Likely, there is some superstitious prejudice against touching the charred remains of victims burned here. By throwing over the lever, the pit empties itself into the depths below. As I told you before—that lever works the dump."

"What—sacrilege!" Tellifer murmured.

"Well, of course, from our viewpoint it's not a very respectful way to treat human remains. But if you'll think of the cannibalistic religious rites of many primitive peoples, this one doesn't seem so shocking."

"You misunderstood me." Tellifer cast a glance of acute distress toward the gleaming mass above the pit. "I meant the dreadful sacrilege of insulting a miracle of loveliness like that, with the agony and ugly after-sights of human sacrifice!"

"That's a viewpoint, too," grinned Otway.

"And we're *still* talking! Human sacrifices! Here we stand—candidates—fairly begging for it. Angered priestess gone after barbaric hordes. Shoot us down from above. Regular death-trap. We take precautions? Not us! We'd rather talk!"

"Beg pardon, Mr. Waring, but the little lady has come back, and she hasn't brought any barbaric hordes."

John B. had returned and his voice sounded mildly reproachful.

"She seems to me to be acting real considerate and pleasant. I judge she noticed the soot on Mr. Sigsbee and Mr. Tellifer, and she's gone and taken the trouble to bring some water and towels so they can wash it off!"

CHAPTER SIX

ASSAI WINE

THE STEWARD'S latest announcement proved correct, though not quite complete. While the guests had been entertaining themselves by inspecting the premises, the hostess must have quietly gone and returned, not once, but several times.

They found her standing beside an array of things which her slender strength could not possibly have availed to transport in a single trip.

There was a large, painted clay water-jar. Neatly folded across its top lay a little heap of what might have been unbleached linen, though on examination the fabric proved to be woven of a soft, yellowish fiber, probably derived from one of the many useful species of palms. Near this jar stood another smaller vessel, of the same general appearance, but surrounded by a half-dozen handleless bowls or cups carved out of smooth, yellow wood, highly polished. And still beside these things was another offering.

Waring removed his hat again and ran his fingers through his hair.

"What's the big idea?" he demanded at large. "Water and towels—fine. Sig and TNT sure need 'em. Festive bowls. May be finger-bowls, but I doubt it. Well and good. Though I, for one, draw the line at cocktails where I don't know my bootlegger. But why all the furriers' display? Does she want us to assume the native costume?"

Otway raised the largest of five black jaguar hides which were ranged in a neat row on the pavement.

"Here's yours, Waring," he chuckled. "The beast that grew this was a lord among his kind. You see, it fastens over the shoulders with these gold clasps. And there's a chain girdle. Suppose you retire to one of those eight convenient dressing-rooms and change? Then if the rest of us like the effect—"

"Set the example yourself! I'm no cave-man. But what's her idea?"

"She is trying to drive it through our thick skulls that she means only kindness toward us!" This from Sigsbee, who, having reverently allowed his hostess to pour water over his hands was now, with equal reverence, accepting a fiber napkin to dry them.

As if handling the heavy water jar had at last wearied her, the girl thereupon surrendered it to the steward. Tellifer, with a vengeful glare at his luckier predecessor, proceeded to his ablutions.

"My experience," said Otway, "has been that among strange peoples it is always well to accept any friendly acts that are offered. No matter what one's private misgivings may be, no trace of them should show in one's manner. By that simple rule I have kept my life and liberty in many situations where others had been less fortunate. Despite our suspicions, we have shown not a trace of hostility toward this girl. We have offered no violence nor rudeness. Who knows? If we continue on our good behavior we may find ourselves accepted as friends, not only by the girl but all her foster-people. I've proved it to work out that way more than once."

"She's a mighty nice girl." Waring was weakly accepting a polished yellow cup. "But d'you think we should risk drinking this—purple stuff?"

The explorer sipped testingly at the liquor which his hostess had gracefully poured from the wine-jar.

"It is only assai wine," he announced. "No harm in it—unless one indulges too freely. See—she is pouring herself a cup! We had best drink, I believe, and then indicate that we would like to meet her people."

"Sensible girl, too," approved Waring. "Cave-man costumes. Nice little gift. But no effort to force 'em on us. Well-bred kid. Out-of-place here, hm?"

"Oh, decidedly," the explorer agreed. "I shall take her away with me when we go."

Otway was a man of morally spotless reputation. As leader of the expedition, he had every right to use the first personal pronoun in announcing his intent to rescue this white girl. Yet the statement seemed displeasing to every one of the explorer's four companions. The glances of all turned upon him with sudden hostility. Sigsbee was heard to mutter something that sounded like "Infernal cheek!"

But Otway gave their opinion no heed. Like the rest, he had drained his cup of purple wine. Innocent though he had claimed the vintage to be, it had deepened the color of his sun-burned face with amazing quickness. The cool gray eyes behind the shell-rims had grown bright and strangely eager. He swayed slightly. He took an unsteady step toward the girl, who had thus far barely stained her lips with the purple liquor.

"Sure!" he added thickly. "Queer I didn't realize that sooner. Girl I've been—waiting for—always! Never got married, just that reason. Looking for this one. Take her away *now!*"

"You will not!"

Waring's mighty hand closed viselike on the naturalist's shoulder, wrenching him backward.

"Tha's right, Alcot," Tellifer approved. "He couldn't half 'preciate loveliness like hers. Tha's for me! I 'preciate such things. Lovely girl—lovely diamond—lovely place—lovely 'dventure—"

As if in adoration of the prevailing loveliness of everything, Tellifer sank to his knees, and subsided gently with his head on one of the jaguar hides.

Waring discovered that he was not restraining Otway, but supporting his sagging weight. He released it, stared stupidly as the explorer's form dropped limply to the floor.

Something was very much wrong. Waring knuckled his eyes savagely. They cleared for an instant. There stood the girl. Her dawn-blue eyes were looking straight into his. There were great tears shining in them! Her whole attitude expressed mournful, drooping dejection. The golden-yellow cup had fallen from her hand. Across the pavement a purple pool spread and crept toward the little bare white feet.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE HAG

WARING knew that he, too, had fallen to the floor, and that he could not rise.

Over him was bending—a face. Above it a circlet of star-white gems gleamed with a ghostly luster. The form beneath was draped in the spotted hide of a jaguar, fastened at the shoulders with fine golden chains.

But that face! Old, seamed, haggard, framed in wild locks of ragged, straying gray hair, with terrible eyes whose dark light had feasted through unnumbered years upon vicious cruelty, with toothless mouth distended in awful laughter—a hag's face, the face of a very night-hag—and up beside it rose a wrinkled, clawlike hand, and hovered above his throat! The vision passed. Merciful oblivion ensued.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"TATA QUARAHY"

AS HE had been last to succumb under the terrific potency of that "harmless assai wine," so the correspondent was first to recover his normal senses. After a few minutes of fogginess, he grasped the main facts of the situation well enough.

In a way, they scarcely even surprised him. Now that the thing was done, he saw with dreary clearness that this had been a foregone conclusion from the instant when five fools, ignoring all circumstantial evidence, had placed their trust in a pair of dawn-blue eyes.

Just at first he had no way of being sure that he was not the sole fool who had survived. But as the others, one by one, awakened and replied to the correspondent's sardonic inquiries, he learned that their number was still complete.

Their voices, however, reached him with a muffled, hollow sound. They were accompanied by a clanking of heavy bronze chains, appropriately dismal.

Through the triangular opening in his cell door, Waring could see along a narrow lane in the greenery to the central court. The place was no longer illum-

inated by the ghostly radiance of Sunfire. It was daytime—and it was rainy weather. Through the open top of the pyramid the rain sluiced down in sheets and torrents, thundering on the palm-fronds, making of that small portion of Sunfire which was visible, a spectral mound of rushing water-surface. It also sent little exploring cold trickles beneath the closed doors of five prison cells—no longer empty.

"Lovely place!" groaned Waring "Oh, l'lovely! Friends and fellow-mourners, it wasn't a new wine. It was the oldest of old stuff. K. O. drops. And we swallowed it! What's that? No, Otway. No more your fault than anyone's. I fell—you fell—we fell. The lot of us needed a keeper. From all signs, we've probably acquired one. It won't be little blue-eyed Susan, though. Her work's done. Such a well-bred kid, too! Wouldn't force native costume on anyone. Oh, no! Say, am I the only cave-man? Or is it unanimous?"

Report drifted down the line that reversion to barbaric fashions had not been forced on the correspondent alone. Not a stitch of civilized clothing, not a weapon, not a single possession with which they had entered the pyramid, had been left to any of the five. In exchange for those things, they had received each a neat stone cell, a handsome black jaguar hide, gold-trimmed, a chain adequate, as Waring had said, to restrain an elephant, —and a hope for continued life so slight as to be practically negligible.

After a time Waring informed the others of that last fading glimpse he had got of a frightful face bending over him. It was agreed that he had been privileged to look upon one of the 'tribe" who inhabited the pyramid. No one, however, was able to explain why this "tribe" had allowed all those boats to rot, some of them through years, undisturbed at the landing state. Or why all save the girl were so extremely shy about showing themselves.

The noise of the rain ceased at last. The outer court brightened with sunshine. For any sounds or signs of life about them, the five might have been chained alone in an empty pyramid at the heart of an empty land.

The utter strangeness of what had occurred combined with memory of their own folly to depress them. Those cells, too, despite the increasing heat outside, were decidedly chilly. Damp, cold draughts blew up from the open shafts at the back. Much rainwater had crept in beneath the doors.

The jaguar-hides were warm as far as they went, but from the prisoners' civilized viewpoint, that wasn't half far enough. Bare feet shifted miserably on cold stone. An occasional sneeze broke the monotony. Except for fruit, none of the party had eaten anything since noon of the previous day. The drugged 'iquor, too, had left an aftermath of outrageous thirst. Yet neither food nor water had been given to them.

The noon hour arrived, as they could tell by diminished shadows and fiercely downbeating glare. Still, no attention had come their way.

Tellifer's cell commanded the best view of the main court. As the sun had approached the zenith, the esthete's dampened enthusiasm had to some degree revived. If the lucent mass of Sunfire had been beautiful at night, beneath the noon sun it became a living glory that gave Petro's name for it, *Tata Quarahy*, Fire of the Sun, new meaning. Tellifer exhausted his vocabulary in trying to do its rainbow splendors justice. But when he finally lapsed into silent adoration the other four made no effort to draw him out of it. Their more practical natures had rather lost interest in Sunfire. Diamond or not, it seemed that the sooty pit beneath it was likely to be of more concern to them.

The sun-rays were now nearly vertical. The central court grew to be a mere dazzle of multicolored refraction. Waves of heat as from a furnace beat through the openings in the cell-doors. With them drifted wisps of white vapor. Presently, a low hissing sound was heard.

The seething noise grew louder. In the court, great clouds of white steam were rising, veiling the brightness of Sunfire. The pit beneath it seethed and bubbled like a monstrous cauldron.

Practical-minded or not, it was Tellifer who solved the simple dynamics of what was going on.

"I was afraid of this," he said. "I was afraid last night, when I first saw the atrocious manner in which that miracle of beauty has been mutilated. Practically sawn in half, for it is an octahedral stone and must originally have possessed nearly twice its present mass. But the lower part has been ruthlessly cleaved way, and the under surface ground and polished. The faceting extends only part way up the sides. The top is a polished cabochon. The scoundrels!" Tellifer's voice shook with emotion. "The soulless vandals! Whoever the fiends were, they cut the most marvelous jewel earth ever produced to suit a vilely utilitarian purpose! Sunfire is a great lens—a burning-glass. It is boiling the collected rain-water out of the pit now. When the pit is dry, the stone of its bowl will rise to red heat—white heat—who knows what temperature under that infernal sun? And that means—that means—"

"Death for any living thing in the pit." declared Otway quietly. "With a victim in the pit, sacrifice to the deity must occur at high noon on any day when the sky is free from clouds. But I say—" the explorer's voice was suddenly distressed—"don't take it that way, man! Why, there is always a chance so long as one has breath in one's body. Brace up!"

"Oh, you don't undertand! Let me be!" There had been a heavy clanking sound in Tellifer's cell. A thud as of a despairing form cast down. "You don't understand!" repeated the esthete sobbingly. "There's no chance! Or hardly one in a million. And it isn't being killed in that pit that's bothering me. It's—Oh, never mind, I tell you! I don't want to talk about it. The thing is too shameful—too horrible! Let me be!"

As all further questioning was met with stony silence from the central cell, his companions did "let him be," at last. That hysterical outburst from one of their number had not tended to brighten the general mood. It seemed to them, also, that if Tellifer really foresaw any more shameful and horrible fate than being broiled alive under a burning lens, he might share his knowledge and at least let them be equally prepared for it.

The day wore wearily by, measured only by lengthening shadows and lessening glare. The sudden night fell. There, on the eight rosy pillars, the iridescent splendor of Sunfire changed slowly to its ghostly glory of the dark hours.

Meantime, in the cells, four of the prisoners had reached that stage of physical and mental misery where, being the sort they were, they spoke to each other frequently and always in jest. The jokes exchanged were of a rather feeble order, it is true. The voices that uttered them were painfully hoarse and thickened. But the applause for each effort was resolutely cordial. Only Tellifer preserved his stony silence.

It was an hour past sunset. The stillness had remained unbroken since their early awakening. Death by mere chill and privation was beginning to seem a very possible alternative to the sacrificial fate they had expected, when the long waiting at last ended and their keeper came to them.

This Story Will Be Concluded in the Next Issue of WEIRD TALES. The Concluding Installment Is Filled With Strange and Unexpected Events. Don't Miss It!

A Story of Stark Adventure
With An Uncanny Climax

THE OUTCASTS

By GEORGE WARBURTON LEWIS

UNDER the half-exposed roots of a small oak, ingeniously screened from detection by chance passers by, crouched a small gray rabbit. A winter wind shrieked through the denuded tree-tops of a narrow strip of wood which shabbily clothed the tortuous ice-ribbon of what had been a creek. It was a bleak, cheerless day.

The rabbit suddenly lifted his alert ears, then as quickly dropped them flat upon his furry back and crouched yet closer to the earth. His round pop-eyes grew larger, his nostrils quivered at clearly scented danger, and instinctive fear clutched his timorous heart.

The next instant, like a missile from a catapult, he launched his lithe body outward and downward. He struck the surface of the frozen creek with something of a shock, his out-thrust claws strove vainly for a hold, and he turned over and slid far along the ice.

In the same instant a heavy club, hurled by a master hand from behind, crashed upon the ice a bare yard ahead of him. Thinking to flee from the nearest peril, he sprang up frantically and leaped away to the rear. Scarce two bounds and a great dark object loomed sheer above him.

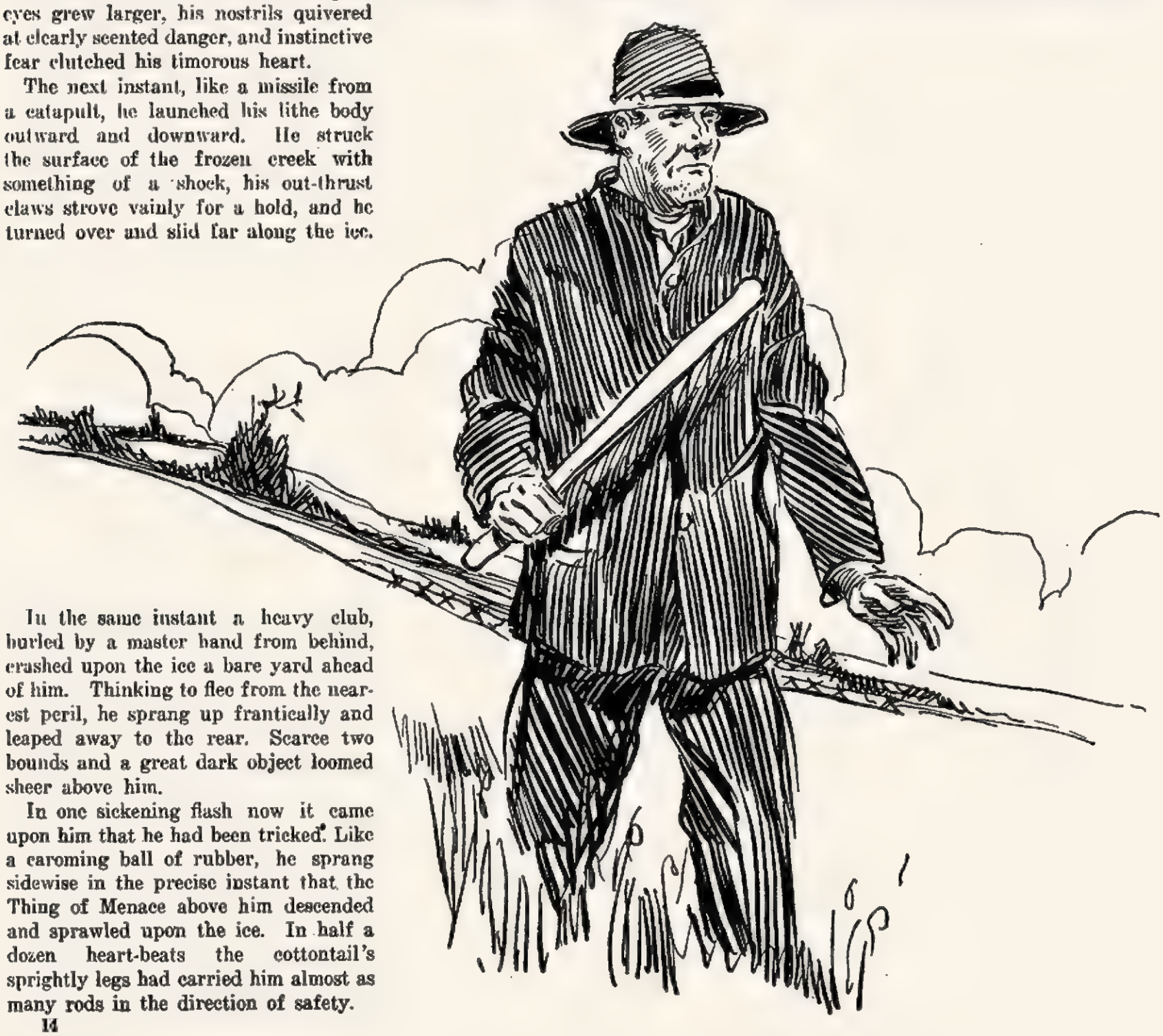
In one sickening flash now it came upon him that he had been tricked. Like a caroming ball of rubber, he sprang sidewise in the precise instant that the Thing of Menace above him descended and sprawled upon the ice. In half a dozen heart-beats the cottontail's sprightly legs had carried him almost as many rods in the direction of safety.

The sprawling thing struggled to its feet with an oath that rang to the heavens—and lo! it was a man.

As his voice resounded along the wooded hillside the look in the man's face changed. What had been grim purpose became faint apprehension. He glanced about quickly as though he expected to see some one approaching. No living thing was anywhere to be seen, however—the January wind, shrilling through the naked branches of the trees, was the Man's only companion.

A few snowflakes sifted down and whirled crazily before the blast. The Man regarded them listlessly, perhaps for a full minute; then he vented another oath, but, unlike the first, it was a guarded, if bitter, execration that hinted at a desire to keep aloof from man, to betray his presence to no person or thing that might be hostile to his aims.

The Man advanced and recovered his club, lying where he had driven it with all his strength at the nimble quarry; then, shivering in his meager clothing, he



moved forward surreptitiously along the ice, his eyes eagerly searching every cover for game, his thick club poised for a quick, deft blow. But evidently all game had deserted its wonted habitat of the creek banks.

Slowly, anxiety crept into the hunter's eyes and played under the mask of a recent beard. The whinny of a horse, feeding in a contiguous stalk-field, at one time startled him almost into a run; and once again, when what sounded like a baying of hounds came from ahead, he turned aside and forced his way into a resisting hazel thicket, where he waited a long time, listening breathlessly.

After a while the Man heard what seemed to be the same baying from a point more distant. Other hunters than himself, he surmised, were abroad, hunting, mayhap, similar game, but how much more did success mean to him than to them!

After a time the Man chanced upon an ear of corn in an otherwise clean-husked field. He tore the grains from the cob with brute eagerness and swung on across the field in search of other ears.

A giant jackrabbit rose before him and bounded away, his long black-tipped ears standing vertical, his easy, rhythmic leaps showing the slight exertion that was companion of his assurance. The Man clenched his teeth and flung his club with all the might of an arm not long since powerful.

His weakness surprised, nay, mildly terrified him. His club fell far short and the long-eared ranger of the prairies loped out of sight at a derisively slow pace before his incredulous eyes. The Man even fancied he perceived something fiendishly human in the open mockery of the rabbit's effortless escape. He uttered a little groan of despair before he again stumbled onward toward the nowhere of his goal.

FOR another hour he pushed forward, following the winding course of the stream. Where the ice-road of the creek crooked round a wooded spur the Man came face to face with a great wolfish dog.

The hunter stopped abruptly, perchance slightly startled, and stared a little suspiciously at the shaggy stranger, his club ready. But the dog showed no sign of hostility. His out-lolling tongue looked dry, as from extreme thirst, and his lean flanks heaved as from the exertion of a long chase. It was obvious to the Man that the distressed stranger had sought the creek for water, only to find ice.

They stood regarding each other in silence, the Man and the dog, the one grim of countenance and great of bulk—truly a menacing figure; the other amiable, fairly exuberant with good nature, his brown eyes smiling and his ragged bush of a tail wagging a message of friendliness to all the world. Apparently he wanted but a single word of encouragement to bound forward and lick the Man's hand in token of meek servility.

But the Man did not pronounce the one word that might so readily have gained him a friend, wherefore the dog waited. The latter, being only a brute, could suspect nothing of the dark purpose that was slowly taking root in the other's brain, else he would have turned away in alarm and fled from the Thing which, having come upon it unexpectedly, he had mistaken for a *man*.

Studiedly, calculatively, the Man took stock of the stranger. The dog, meanwhile, did not budge, but his great bush of a tail suddenly ceased wagging and his small pointed ears seemed all but to hide themselves in the coarse hair of his shaggy coat. It was as if some vague distrust of the Man had forced itself unbidden upon him.

"Come here, you fool!" said the Man at last, half whimsically, and, cheerfully obedient, the dog gave a playful bound and buried his dry muzzle in the speaker's free hand, whining in friendly canine fashion, heedless of the ominous club.

The Man drew one haind out of his glove and stroked the dog's tangled coat.

"Ha! you tramp," he exclaimed, "you're a regular boneyard under all that mat of hair, ain't you?"

The Tramp, thus happily named, thrashed his ragged tail about in high glee. He only stopped after a space to lick the blue ice with his pasty tongue, as though he would make clear to the Man his grievous plight. But the gray hard face of the other remained destitute of pity. The bleak cynicism in his expression even seemed to stand out in bolder relief.

"We're sure two of a kind, ain't we, vagabond? And after all it may be a lucky thing for *me* we met. . . . You see, old fellow, I'm starving. You look as if you knew what it meant to starve, yourself. If you've ever been as hungry or as desperately miserable as I am now you'll not think hard of me for what I've got to do. Yes, yes! I know you're anxious to be friendly all right"—at the dog, suspicion put to rout, snuggled closer to him—"but there's only *one way I can see you* at present," he went on, his drawl growing as cold as wind blowing off ice. "You see, I've got to *live, vagabond—and by God I'm going to live!*"

The ferocity of some wild thing of prey, cornered, of a sudden had come into the human thing's wheezy voice. After a moment he added, half to himself, as if in justification of his fell design:

"You're only a useless, half-starved tramp-dog, anyway."

At the accusation the vagabond suddenly ceased licking the ice and raised his head. For a moment he gazed steadily into the Man's eyes with every appearance of human comprehension. But the Man was familiar with the ways of dogs, as with the ways of men. He was not disconcerted.

He drew from his pocket a heavy-bladed knife, with which he somewhat laboriously gouged a little cavity in the ice, carefully preserving the resulting chips. Swinging his arms rapidly, he slowly forced the sluggish blood into his blue-gray hands until presently they tingled and glowed with comparative warmth. This done, he assembled the chips, a double handful. The melting action of his hands was assisted by his steaming breath.

Gradually the water dripped through his fingers and filled the small cavity in the ice, which was the one way to obtain drink, since the ice itself lay in a single solid cake clear to the creek-bottom.

The Man turned from his labor to find the Tramp watching him intently, his small wolflike ears perked forward in pathetic eagerness.

"There—take it!" jerked out the Man in a voice that was almost a croak.

He rose with difficulty, club in hand.

"That's the last you'll get—*or need*—for a d—d long time," he muttered, half inaudibly. His lids had narrowed and the pupils of his shag-browed eyes might have been points of flame.

The vagabond wagged his flail-like tail gratefully and was lapping at the tiny pool before his dry tongue had reached its surface. Towering above the unsuspecting brute, the Man stretched his long arms tentatively. There must be no bungling, he thought; he reasoned that his life was at stake.

When the tiny hole was all but dry he suddenly gripped the club in both hands and swung with mighty force for the tramp-dog's head.

A MILLION echoes resounded through the lonely little wood as a chorus of shrill, agonizing cries contended dissonantly with hoarse, full-throated human curses.

The vagabond staggered blindly away from the fatal lure of the sweetly reviving nectar, too dazed, too horribly numbed for flight, a great lump pushing

out the tangled hair on one side of his head. Gradually his tremulous yelps became low howls of pain that dolefully simulated a distressed human voice.

The Man labored to his feet, for the force of his wide-swung blow had carried him off his precarious footing. His club had fallen at a wrong angle. The fury of chagrin showed in his face, but a great fear was tugging at his heart—fear lest the tumult of his accursed fiasco had been heard.

Meanwhile, he eyed the wounded dog warily as if expecting to be attacked. But the Tramp, having smothered his howls of pain, stood whining now, trembling forelegs braced apart to help his equipoise. After a little while he held his disfigured head sidewise and gazed up at the Man out of bloodshot eyes, cowed, vastly afraid, yet there seemed to be something of inquiry as to the Man's motive in the vagabond's steady look.

"Come here and shut up your infernal whining," said the Man after a moment; "and don't make this thing any worse." His growing weakness made him the more bitter. He hesitated to risk the clamor in which a second attempt on his companion outcast's life might result.

At his command the Tramp edged nearer, strangely enough, groveling, his rag of a tail drooped between his legs in abject submission.

"We've got to get out of here," muttered the Man, glancing about nervously. That which he had not had the strength to kill he would now take back as a companion and friend. It was policy. "I wish I'd thought before," he wheezed, noting the injury he had inflicted on the Tramp. "Maybe—maybe you could have caught a rabbit! But you'd play hell catching one now," he murmured grimly, regarding fixedly a tiny trickle of red that came from the Tramp's nostrils.

They went away together, the Man and the dog, both animals now, equally outcasts, the one of man, the other of man's institution, society. To all appearances they were as good friends now as before, only now the four-legged one watched the other's movements. But the higher animal felt that he had nothing to fear from the baser one, on whom he could practice any treachery, and he therefore burdened his rapidly waning strength with no useless vigilance.

And thus they went on—hunting, the Man with all the intelligence and artfulness that God had given him, the dog more weakly, inertly, as the journey lengthened, from pain and loss of blood.

About the middle of the forenoon the Man narrowly escaped detection by seven or eight men whom he chanced upon, encamped in a ravine. All were heavily armed, and the Man knew all too well that they were a sheriff's posse. Again, later in the day, the outcase caught sight of two men armed with Winchesters. They were quite near him before he became aware of their presence, but they gave no sign of having seen either him or the Tramp.

He quickly concealed himself behind a hedge and watched one of the men pointing at a wolf, which had showed itself boldly in a nearby cornfield. After a time the men separated, and one of them, a lean giant, turned and came as straight toward the Man's hiding-place as though he had divined the outcast's presence. Fortune had indeed turned traitor.

A thought of his own late perfidy came to him, but he did not wince. Morally, he did not often wince; physically his courage was merely that of many another man.

He watched the tall man come nearer, steadily nearer; a large man, he was, with an easy confident stride. His calm eyes swept his surroundings leisurely, and his cool slow manner seemed in discord with the vigilance of the man-hunter. But as the man in hiding continued to watch the other, he was suddenly shaken by a tremor that rippled through every fiber of his being.

"Great God!" he whispered to the deaf and unanswering earth, "it's *him!*"

THE Man recognized the sheriff of his own county—a man whose record of efficiency as an officer of the law had long since been written in letters of blood.

The outcast flattened himself yet closer to the earth, visions of grim walls and iron bars torturing his confused brain. Must his eleven days' awful struggle end in captivity? The thought of it kindled a new desperation in his heart.

The animal that is in all men was uppermost in the outcast. It served partly to master, to hold his terror in check, for cunning in animals is not unlike art in men. A fugitive from justice, wanted for a crime which, day on casual day for eleven such periods of torment, had by turns repelled, frightened and haunted him, the social outcast was at last at bay.

The tall sheriff came swinging slowly forward along the ridge. In a moment he was opposite the quarry. Through the apparently insufficient screen of outstanding branches he seemed to look squarely into the fugitive's eyes. For perhaps the tenth of a second he hesitated—then went on.

But the Man feared that he had in reality been seen, that the sheriff, believing him armed, had only feigned ignorance of his presence—was going straight to fetch his posse, the identical men he had seen encamped in the ravine. The fugitive was certain he knew. The sheriff's ruse was to avoid bloodshed by surrounding and overawing him. The terrible thought came to the Man like an electric flash, and simultaneously all compunction deserted him.

Every other consideration was instantly subordinated to the love of life. If he had not been essentially so before, in a twinkling the Man now became the animal wholly.

The sheriff had barely passed him when he bounded to his feet like a waiting tiger and swung his thick club. Came the supreme test of human quickness. Only the officer's keen ear warned him, for he had not caught sight of the fugitive in hiding. Like lightning the sheriff wheeled half round, his rifle at hip, but the descending club met him fair; he dropped inertly, his undischarged weapon still gripped in his hands.

The tramp-dog, coming up at the sound of the scuffle, stopped a few feet short of the gruesome object on the ground, sniffing warily, his forelegs forward as if to favor prompt retreat. The coarse hair on his fleshless back stood up like spines. He gave a single deep growl. His bloodshot eyes, oddly enough, were not on the motionless thing on the ground, but glaring at the Man, and in a way that was strangely sinister.

The sheriff's body was left where his slayer had so lately lain in hiding behind the hedge, only the corpse, as a matter of design, was somewhat better screened from observation.

The fugitive crawled a hundred yards through a weed patch, dropped into a little gully and descended toward thicker shelter. He was armed now with the spoil of his late conquest, a Winchester. The vagabond still followed him. The trickle of blood from the unhappy brute's nose had ceased and he looked somewhat revived. Haply he had found water or a bite of food somewhere.

Soon the sun was down. The shadows deepened among the trees where the two strange fugitives, one by unexplainable choice, picked their way onward.

Once the psychological something that drove him forward in the face of nature's protests nearly forsook the Man. He sank to the ground cursing desperately in a voice that was woefully faint and wheezy and which seemed to belong to nothing that was human. It was not dissimilar to the death wail of some dying animal. The dog waited patiently

beside him until his companion regained his feet. This the fugitive noted dully, wondering vaguely if the starving tramp-dog was destined to profit by *his* finish even as he had hoped to profit—to *live*—by the death of the dog.

It was by accident that the Man's dimming eyes all at once lighted on something that instantly fixed them in a stare of incredulity. On the vagabond's pendulous chops was the purpling stain of fresh blood, and, adhering to the corners of his great mouth, was the unmistakable gray-brown fur of a rabbit. In the Man, unbelief gave way to conviction, and conviction to instant and insane passion.

"Why—*damn you!*" the one brute arraigned the other, "you've actually caught a rabbit—and sneaked away and eaten every hell-fired bit of it by yourself! . . . And—it was the drink I gave you that enabled you to catch it——"

The dog shrank from the Man instinctively as the latter thrust out a trembling forefinger in accusation.

"That rabbit would have meant—would have meant *life* to me," whined the fugitive despairingly, "and you—a miserable, good-for-nothing tramp-dog whose life ain't worth a copper—you sneaked off and—*ate—a—whole—rabbit!*"

The Man's disheartened tone was like the wail of one who faces execution. An odd glitter had suddenly dissipated the listless, lifeless look in his heavy-browed eyes.

The vagabond shrank yet farther away from his accuser, as though he understood and repented. But the Man was obdurate, resolved. He leveled the Winchester evenly at his companion's head, but, suddenly remembering the value of silence, he lowered the weapon, leaned it conveniently against a tree and selected a club.

No sooner was the club in the Man's hands than the tramp-dog rose guardedly from his haunches, all fear seemingly having left him. The Man saw this and knew by logic what the brute knew by instinct, but as always the higher animal felt confident of his superiority over the lower one.

"I'd kill you now even if I didn't have to," wheezed the Man.

The tramp-dog's bloodshot eyes were steadily following the club. His small pointed ears stood forward in a strangely menacing expression and the shaggy hair along his great dark-gray back bristled savagely.

The Man surveyed the dog and comprehended; but already they had begun circling and the rifle was between him and the dog that seemed all of a sudden to have strangely changed.

"*Great* God!" choked out the Man as a horrible misgiving resolved itself into seeming certainty; "*it's a wolf!*"

THE vagabond advanced a pace and paused, his sharp muzzle pointing, a foreleg raised intently. He might have been some great, disheveled pointer stalking game. The Man stood irresolute, club clenched in hands.

"*You were a damn strange looking dog from the first,*" he muttered, remembering.

A little courage came back to him as the lapsing seconds stayed the crisis and he recalled the vagabond's wound and his weakened condition. However, he had lately regaled himself with a rabbit, bitterly thought the Man.

Barely two paces separated the outcast from his unwisely discarded Winchester. Holding his club before him as a shield, he gave a sudden spring for the weapon and salvation. It was the crucial moment. His fingers were almost closing upon the rifle when a flash of gray went up from the ground in a diagonal streak that might have been a tongue of lightning.

There was a single half-stifled growl, followed by a sputtering cry of horror, and they went down together, the Man and the dog, the one conscious of a mighty tearing at his whiskery throat and instinctively fumbling for the heavy-bladed knife he carried, the powerful jaws of the other gripping with all the desperation of brute ferocity, as though the tramp-dog comprehended the true life-and-death nature of the contest.

The Man fought as shrewdly and as calculatively as though his adversary were a man and not a brute. He had reason to know the value of a good knife, and at last he got hold of and held the weapon, open-bladed, in his free hand; but because of the precious seconds necessarily lost in bringing it into play, the slashes he finally drove at the wolf-dog's exposed flank were so feeble that they scarcely more than penetrated the tangled mat of the vagabond's shaggy coat.

AT MIDNIGHT the wolf-dog, after swift, noiseless flight came to a standstill before a bush-screened cave in a rugged wood, many miles from the scene of his battle with the outlaw. The pale light of a winter moon, filtering down through naked tree-tops, robed him now as if in a plaid coat of curiously patterned silver and ebony, fantastically outling the sharp angles of his fleshless body and recasting him in a periphery as of some dread werewolf, grim, gaunt and terrible.

One watching him now could not have said with certainty whether he was dog or wolf. Ever and anon he peered back uneasily along his trail and listened, after the wary manner of his late companion. But behind him there was naught but moonlight and silence and distance interminable.

As he stood motionless, gazing away to the rear, something of queer contentment after the day's work seemed to grow into the vagabond's aspect. Something in his very poise, nay, in the way he held his swollen and disfigured head, seemed to announce that with him all was well. Once again he moved forward, then once more he paused and ran his bloodshot eyes back over the moon-silvered trail: Silence, brooding, mysterious.

He lifted his wounded head and contemplated the westering moon with an expression that was somehow not unlike that which depicts the processes of a reasoning human mind. His mouth was a little way open, his snow-white teeth showing between lips that were drawn back in the unmistakable semblance of a wide and exultant grin! After a moment he cast a final glance backward, then trotted forward as silently as a shadow and disappeared in the cave.

In the ragged halfbreed the gentle ancestry of the dooryard dog had fought an all-day fight with the savage strain of the great timber-wolf, but the more fiercely vital of the contending elements had won at last, and the vagabond, guilty now of a tragic and awful thing of which his lingering dog instinct vaguely accused him, had gone back forever to the wary wanderers from which he had descended, and from whose silent lurking places in the shadowy forests he had strayed for the space of a generation.

A Creepy Narrative of Weird Events Is

THE ROOM OF THE BLACK VELVET DRAPES

By B. W. SLINEY

IT WAS a miserable night to be out of doors.

Overhead the heavy clouds hung low, reflecting back the myriad lights of the city with a lurid glow, imparting an air of deep oppression. No breath of air stirred; it was deathly still, yet one had the feeling that it was but the calm before the impending storm. A smoky fog blurred the street lights and made the atmosphere still more oppressive.

Now and then a lone pedestrian or cab came out of the midst, passed, and was again swallowed by the shadows. It was, indeed, a surly night, and one that honest men stepped into with misgiving.

But as chance and my occupation would have it, that evening I was obliged to wade through the murky blackness to the home of Ormond Wier, the renowned psychologist. Another cheerless prospect, for Wier was known to be rather eccentric. However, editors are dictatorial persons, and mine, though a warm personal friend, demanded his stories when they were due.

I had been requested to interview Wier for the next number of the magazine. It was only through the greatest diplomacy that I succeeded in arranging an appointment with Wier at all, so I suppose that I should have gone with eager step to fulfill the engagement. But somehow, I could not feel enthused about it. Perhaps it was the weather. Or perhaps it was a foreboding—

I chose to walk to his home, thinking that the fresh air might do me good and cheer me up a bit. Reaching Wier's mansion with a few minutes to spare, I remained on the opposite side of the street and studied it. It stood on a corner and loomed up against the reflecting clouds like an immense blot of ink, sombre, mysterious, even sinister. For some unaccountable reason it had a dome, and the whole was dominated by that huge half-round shape. All in all, it was a dismal old place, and I never had occasion to pass it, even in the daytime, without a slight chill running up and down my spine, causing me to walk a trifle faster.

From afar, the eight o'clock chimes boomed through the heavy air. It was the hour of the appointment.

I crossed the street and rang the bell, the feeling of dread more pronounced than ever. The door opened and I stepped inside, prepared to give my card to the butler.

But no butler was there; I stood alone in a long, high-ceiled, richly-furnished corridor. Slightly perturbed, I watched the door swing shut, and stood for a moment wondering what I should do.

Only a moment did I stand, for presently a door at the end of the corridor opened, and Wier, whom I had met before, stepped into the room.

"Good evening," he greeted me, with a pleasant smile. "I was expecting you. Come into my study where we can talk undisturbed."

Making some conventional reply, I followed him into a smaller hall, and from thence to a narrow, dimly-lighted passage. Many other passages exactly similar there were, branching off to the right and left, and Wier led me from one to another in a most confusing manner. They formed a veritable labyrinth, dark and damp, and increased my moroseness tenfold. At last, after a seemingly interminable period of walking, with Wier's massive head, which was strangely like the dome of his house, bobbing up and down before me, we came to a halt against a blank wall. Wier fumbled a moment and a panel slid noiselessly aside, and he stepped into a second and shorter passage, motioning for me to follow.

"My study," he said, swinging open a ponderous door at the end. "Step in."

I had never seen such a room before in all my life. The first impression was of vastness; the second, of simple magnificence. Only two pieces of furniture were in the room; a carved ebony table and an immense chair to match. On the table lay a single leather bound volume; nothing more.

And then, with a shock of surprise, I noticed that which lent to the study its air of vastness. The room was perfectly circular, and the entire surface of the walls were hung with rich black velvet draperies. Up and up they extended, past the hanging bowls of lights; past into the shadows, and one imagined that he could faintly see them end in a dome at the top.

At equal distances about the room stood ancient Egyptian sarcophagi, grim and mystical. A silence pervaded; a silence as heavy and deep as the velvet drapes around the room; a silence so dense that it could be felt; so intense that even the breathing of Wier and myself sounded like the whistling of wind in a chimney. The slightest stir multiplied upon itself until it resembled the beating of a tom-tom. Then the reverberations would die away, and once more the deathly quiet would reign.

"My study," repeated Wier, a pardonable note of pride in his voice. "Be seated while I get another chair. This room is absolutely sound proof; you will not be disturbed."

He withdrew. The door closed behind him, and the curtain he had been holding aside swished into place.

I was alone.

I WILL confess that I did not like it. The unhuman carvings on the sarcophagi grinned malignantly at me, and the silence fairly shrieked its possession of the room.

Nervously, I walked across a luxurious plush rug of deep maroon to the center of the room and sat down to await the return of Wier. He was taking needlessly long to return with that chair.

I picked up and glanced through the solitary volume. It was Wier's work, "The Human Mind"—the most amazing psychological treatise ever penned. To it Wier owed his fame, and to it I owed my presence in his mysterious house. I was familar with the book—a fantastic piece of work, not intended to allay despondency. I replaced it.

Still Wier did not return, and still the gloomy shadows and intense silence filled the place. If I looked up, the graven images on the sarcophagi stared at me; if I glanced downward, carved ebony imps on the table legs scowled arrogantly. Every detail seemed to have some hidden meaning, some strange influence, and every detail set my nerves on edge.

Deciding that moving about would be better than sitting still, I examined a sarcophagus. It was the genuine thing, carved from rich red porphyry, and it pleased me not to find an imitation amid the severe splendor of the study. I walked from one to another, examining them all. Twelve there were, each seeming more marvelous than the one before.

At the twelfth I hesitated longer than usual, noting every detail. It was a masterpiece in terra cotta, rare, and surely worth a small fortune. Then slowly, but ever stronger, like the growth of a temptation, came the question—"Is it empty?"

A morbid desire to learn seized me and played havoc with my already overwrought sensibilities. I would peek within. I raised the lid slightly—shoved it back hurriedly. A feeling of nausea overcame me; my knees weakened and I trembled feebly. A body was in the case, but—it was not a mummy.

I returned to the table in a trance. *Why* didn't Wier come? All my former melancholy gave away to fear. What signified these unholy things in this strange man's house? Were all the mummy cases so occupied?

The latter question took the form of an obsession. I felt that I *must* learn, and yet I feared to investigate further. But at length dread was overcome; I went to the fifth case, raised the lid—was confronted by the same gruesome sight. A human body was within, but the features were modern.

The body was not mummified, but metal-plated, and it shimmered with a silver-like luster. It was not a cast, not a carving. The expression was too ghastly real for that. The face was that of an American; the features, contorted shockingly, gave evidence of great mental anguish before death.

How came Wier to possess these? What were his aims? What kept him away so long? These and a multitude of similar questions surged through my agitated brain.

I was now wholly resigned to fear, and I believe that I was perilously near the verge of madness. The deathly quiet; the sarcophagi with their grim burdens; the sable curtains; and again the quiet.

I fled to the table and cried out, but the echo reverberated so uproariously and sounded so unreal that I stopped short, and dared not repeat the experiment. I buried my head in my arms for a few minutes, striving vainly to compose my shattered thoughts. But I was powerless. Some sinister, overwhelming force seemed to take hold of my will and juggle it without mercy.

I felt that I must move about; do something. I glanced up, cried out in dismay. The twelfth sarcophagus had vanished! With wildly pounding heart I counted them to make sure. One, two, three . . . . ten, eleven . . . . The twelfth had utterly disappeared; yet the silence had not been broken, nor had anyone entered the room.

Where *was* Wier? What infamous hoax was he trying to put off on me?

My mind wandered. I was unable to think clearly or to direct my thoughts. That fifth mummy case—had it vanished, too? No, it had not moved, but—most peculiar—the cold stone eyes of the carved cover gleamed wickedly. Yet they attracted . . . like eyes of a snake . . . they beckoned.

And I responded.

WHEN I stood before the case the eyes gleamed no longer. Fool! Thus to allow my imagination to run riot with me because the night was stormy and I was in a strange room! Perhaps I had even imagined that the twelfth case had disappeared. I turned. It stood in its proper place, but its graven face seemed to leer disconcertingly.

I now felt that all had been a trick of my fancy. Of course the huge old coffins were empty! Courage surged up within me, dispelling my terror. I would prove to myself my hallucination.

I drew aside the cover of the fifth sarcophagus, boldly this second time. Suddenly my body went nerveless; I stood dumbfounded, paralyzed. The cover of the sarcophagus slipped from my senseless fingers and shattered on the floor with a crash that I vaguely noticed. And, like it, all my regained control, all my restored confidence fell from me, leaving me more enervated than ever; my reason further gone.

There, in the sarcophagus, instead of unoccupied space, or at worst, metal-plated body, stood Wier, his face contorted fearfully, his eyes gleaming with frightful luster. He laughed diabolically and stepped out. The echoes flung the ungodly sound about the room with horrible realism.

Mechanically, I retreated a few paces. Wier advanced toward me, I again fell back.

"Fool!" he hissed, "you came to seek a story! To learn how I study the mind! To give it to a blatant press! You shall learn! But never will you see your story in print. You will become a part of the tale, but—you will not be able to write it. Look! Here is your story!"

He strode across the room and pulled a cord. The hanging velvets parted and revealed a door of solid bronze. Wier threw it open, but there remained several doors of wood. At last he reached a heavy iron grating, unlocked it, and threw it open also. Then he seated himself in the carved ebony chair, facing the portals he had swung aside.

"Come here," he commanded, "or my creatures will tear you to bits. Here is one now . . . "

I did not relish the vision Wier pictured, so I stepped to his side. In fact, I was quite powerless to do aught but obey, regardless of what my sentiments might have been.

"Look!"

Out of the door came—a creature. It had once been a woman, a beautiful woman. But now her reason was gone; her face was blank and expressionless; dull were her eyes and listless her step. She advanced nearly to the table.

Then, catching sight of Wier, she became a creature transformed. Hatred flamed in her eyes and she assumed a menacing attitude. She crouched as if to spring at him. He laughed hellishly, clapping his hands sharply together. The woman wilted and crept away.

"Once my wife," said Wier leeringly, swaying back and forth in his huge chair. "But I have taught her to hate me. It is the only emotion she possesses, for I have pruned away all the others, and when she does not hate, she does nothing."

I shuddered.

Another of his puppets came into the room. I watched with fascinated dread. A middle aged man he was, but his actions had the same listless character as those of the first victim. This one, however, when he noticed Wier, fell into the most abject terror, and uttering shriek after shriek, fled from the study.

"Fear," explained Wier, "and once my butler. Now you understand why I have a soundproof study."

Others came. Love, who fawned all over the beast; Pride, who deigned not to notice him; Joy, a clever fool had not his case been so tragic, laughed merrily and capered for the demon; Greed, who scrambled piteously for a few pennies; the mournful resignation of Despair; the buoyant effervescence of Happiness

—all were there, an atrocious sacrifice for every emotion of Man; all faded back into a hopeless lethargy at the sound of Wier's abominable voice and the sharp clap of his hands.

Wier played with them a long time, absorbed apparently with his observations, but in reality watching the effect of his experiment on me. He sat back in his chair, a huge, powerfully built man, nearly filling it. His motions were quick, catlike. His massive head bespoke a great intellect; his face, almost lost in the piercing gleam of his eyes, reflected his thoughts as vividly as the faces of his insane puppets reflected their only emotion.

He turned to me and smiled. It was difficult to realize that the loathsome expression I now saw was framed by the same mouth that had greeted me so pleasantly an hour before. He was a veritable Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, so complete was his transformation.

"There is your story! And now for your part. You are qualified to take it; you have been preparing all evening. Yes! I have arranged everything. I knew when I first met you that you would be susceptible to my treatment. And I was right! The pending storm was an excellent prelude for your sensitive nature; the self-opening door disturbed you, for you did not seem to realize that it was merely controlled by an electrical device; the maze gave stimulus to your ready imagination. Then being left alone; the discovery of the bodies in the sarcophagi; the vanishing of one of the cases and its reappearance, made possible by having a trap underneath; a bit of hypnotic influence from me; finding me where you expected nothing; this review we have just been holding—all these things have been undermining your intellect.

"Why, man!" he pronounced the words vehemently, rapping sharply on the table as he uttered each syllable, as if to give added emphasis, "you are even now on the brink of insanity. You *shall* go insane, and then I will train your mind until it is an absolute blank. Then I intend to develop a new emotion within you—one unknown to Mankind! Most enlightening! You should feel honored, sir, that you are chosen. Come, are you ready to begin?"

"Let me go!" I shrieked in a frenzy. "Let me go!"

"Quiet! or I must get another sarcophagus. I preserve those who die—silver-plate them by a process I have evolved. Some die—those who cannot release their grip on their intellects, and those I preserve forever in recognition of their wills. You, too, will die if you do not submit . . . . "

My brain was in a turmoil. Things spun dizzily before me, hazy fancies came to mind, irrelevant scence flashed through my brain. But up out of this chaos of ideas a thought struggled to the surface.

"The police," I said hoarsely, but with a new note of hope in my voice, "I will be missed!"

Wier smiled again his evil, triumphant smile.

"Yes, but you will be found. Tomorrow, a body mutilated beyond recognition, with your clothes and papers, will be found in the river. And your friends will wonder how it happened, and attend your funeral with heavy hearts."

He stretched his hand toward me. I leaped back. His words had extinguished all hope, but I was determined not to submit to his evil designs without a struggle. I now recognized fully the power of this pitiless demon, and though I realized that I merely furthered his ends by attempting to keep from him and refusing to give up, I could not bring myself to put an end to it then and there. The vision of the bodies in the mummy cases was too vividly fresh in my mind. And, too, the desire to live, to be free, was still mine.

Wier started after me. Something seemed to snap in my brain, and my conscious self stepped from the body that was mine, and stood aside, wondering.

Wier advanced; my body retreated. He followed, slowly, stealthily, like a cat not quite sure of his prey.

"YOU will become a part of the story," he chanted over and over in a monotonous tone. "Your senses fail you; your emotions are fading! The castles of your mind—the emotions—they are breaking! They crumble . . . . fall! *I* am the cause of the havoc! Ormond Wier! Acclaimed by men, and wrecker of their souls! You are forgetting . . . . you are forgetting . . . . forgetting . . . . "

The monotone of his voice wearied me. I felt tired and exhausted. My retreat before Wier's steady advance became wholly automatic. I considered all he said, and decided he was right. I *was* going insane. My emotions—the castles of my mind—were falling away; decaying. Still my body ran, still my conscious self stood aside and watched with acute interest.

Every detail of those awful moments struck with photographic distinctness. The building quivered with tension; a strange vibration filled the air. Without thinking of it, I realized that it was the spirit of the storm, broken at last. Still we circled about the room; still Wier chanted his monotonous words, and still he regarded me with that merciless fixed gaze of his.

"The castles of the mind! Reason! All the emotions! They crumble and fall . . . . "

"For God's sake!" I managed to gasp.

"God?" Wier stopped. "There is no God. If there were he would save you. He would have saved the others!" he concluded sneeringly, and took up his relentless pursuit once more. "The castles of the mind . . . . "

The strain was growing unbearable. With each passing second the tension in my brain grew greater. Little wonder! The gradual circling about the room, Wier's unceasing pursuit, the weird chant, his hypnotic gaze—all were the result of a carefully thought out plan; the result of experience and twelve failures—failures in which the happy victim had died!

"The castles of the mind . . . . they fall . . . . fall . . . . "

Still the atmosphere seemed charged with that strange vibration. But no murmur of the storm penetrated the study's soundproof walls; in my superacute state I merely sensed it, and knew that the elements sympathized.

"Reason! All the emotions . . . . "

Suddenly Fear rushed into the room, crying apprehensively. Wier hesitated and paled slightly. The wretch stopped, glanced about the room wildly, and rushed terror-stricken to Wier's side.

Wier's fist smashed into the unfortunate's face. His cries ceased instantly; he staggered, struck me in falling. The slight jar was sufficient to send me reeling, so completely had the mental strain drained my physical strength. My legs doubled beneath me; I fell to the floor and rolled under the colossal table.

My moment had come. I prayed fervently and waited for the end with wildly palpitating heart.

The building shook to its very foundations. Without warning, the silence was split into a billion sounds. It seemed as if all the uproar of creation had been concentrated in that one room. I thought that it was the last . . . . that the tumult marked the failing of my mind.

Bits of plaster showered on the table and rug about me. Larger pieces fell until it was a veritable rain of masonry. Wier cursed. The hanging lights crashed to the floor. The place was left in utter blackness. Slowly the plaster ceased to fall on the table above me, and gradually the room grew brighter. In the growing brilliance I could see Wier, stretched

almost at my side on the floor, inert and deathlike.

As I crawled from under the heavy table Wier's former wife entered the room. She spied him; became a demon! Stealthily she approached him. Others came after her. She fell upon him, tore at his throat; scratched his face; sank her teeth in his flesh . . . .

One by one her companions joined her, and only Love—blind, illusioned Love—fought for the beast. As I watched in a trance of terror, horrified, yet unable to prevent, Wier lost all human shape . . .

Retribution!

The study grew constantly brighter. Smoke filled the place. The costly velvet drapes were blazing columns of flames. The study was growing unbearably hot, too.

With a shock, I realized my danger—a new danger, no less awful than the one from which I had just escaped. Flaming bits of wood and cloth fell about me. I rushed into the room where Wier had kept his puppets confined. No hope there; no windows, no doors.

I flew back to the fiery inferno and dashed about despairingly. I could not find the door!

Despair! Then hope, as Wier's words came back to me—"by simply having a trap underneath"—the twelfth sarcophagus!

I ran to it and shoved. It would not budge. Time after time I tried it, but with no success. The heat was scorching in its intensity, and the drapes were now roaring to the floor, masses of flame. The victims of Wier's flagrant crime were still fighting over him, indifferent to the heat. If one of the curtains should fall on me. . . .

I gave one mighty heave with the sudden strength of despair. The sarcophagus tottered, and fell. The panel upon which it had been resting came up with it, revealing a black rectangular hole. I staggered on the edge a moment, dizzy with exertion. Then I plunged into the blackness.

DAYS PASSED before I regained my faculties—days in which I seemed to be forever falling. But it was many months before I fully recovered from the shock. It was not until then that I was told that lightning had struck the dome of Wier's home and set it on fire, and that firemen had stumbled on my body by merest chance. All of Wier's unfortunate victims perished in the sombre room of the black velvet drapes and the twelve sarcophagi. Perhaps it was for the best . . . .

But never will I, come what may, forget those few terrible hours when my emotions, the castles of my mind, were almost taken from me.

A Five-Minute Tale by Culpeper Chunn

Doctor X

"OUR OLD PROFESSOR, Sven Borgen, has become famous almost over night," I remarked, glancing up from the morning paper. "You remember him, don't you, Pat?"

"Sure," returned McKane, lazily flicking an imaginary speck of dust from his burnt-orange tie. "The Swede who used to lecture on psychology at G. W. I. during our last year there. He was bow-legged and had a cast in his right eye. Erratic nut, what? We used to call him Bug. What has he done now? Proclaimed himself emperor of Wuzu or eloped with his grandmother?"

"Nothing of such international concern," I said. "But he appears to have gotten himself in the limelight just the same. A few days ago it became known that he had perfected an operation for grafting the brain of an animal in the cranium of another animal of the same species, in much the same way, as I understand it, that living tissue and bone are grafted on human beings."

"Ah!" rejoined McKane, and yawned. "What is Consolidated Steel quoted at this morning?"

"His experiments have been successful to a degree almost past belief," I continued, ignoring his question. "The paper says that out of fifty operations performed on dogs and other small mammals only two proved fatal. These operations, the account continues, have been performed chiefly on living animals, but in one case at least the brain of a live dog was grafted in the cranium of a dog killed by concussion of the brain. The dead dog was brought to life."

"Tough on the first pup," Pat commented.

"Although Borgen's experiments have been confined to animal subjects," I resumed, "he was recently granted permission by the Swedish authorities to experiment with incurable patients in an asylum for the insane, but on the very day the story was given out to the papers—which, by the way, are playing it up big—he was run over by a street car and instantly killed."

"Lucky devil," said McKane, without much interest. "If he had lived he would have ended his days in a dippy-house. Brain-graft? Pooh! The man had ants in his attic."

"I don't know so much about that," I rejoined. "The paper says—"

"Bunk!" McKane interrupted rudely.

"The paper says," I continued doggedly, "that he—"

"Piffle!"

"You are wrong," interposed a quiet voice behind us. "'Piffle' is scarcely the word. The story about Doctor Borgen in the morning papers is quite true. I happen to know the facts in the case."

I turned my head sharply and gazed at the speaker. He had stopped directly behind my chair and was gazing over my shoulder at the paper spread out over my knees.

He was a tall man of uncertain age and nationality, although there was an elusive something about him that suggested the Scandinavian. He had a saturnine face the color of old parchment, a hawklike nose, and a pair of glittering blue eyes that appeared greenly iridescent when one gazed into their depths. He was dressed in a shabby black suit of clothes, wore a slouch hat pulled down over his forehead, and a well-known brand of cigarette hung from between his thin red lips.

An unprepossessing person, in short, and yet, strangely enough, one who at once roused my interest.

"And who the devil might you be?" asked McKane, looking him up and down with an insolent eye.

"I beg your pardon," returned the stranger, without embarrassment, "I

happened to hear the tail-end of your conversation as I was passing, and as Doctor Borgen once honored me with his friendship, I could not let your statement touching his mental condition pass unchallenged. Sven Borgen was not a lunatic, as you seem to think, but a genius whose death will prove a sad blow to science."

"And this newspaper story is based on fact?" I questioned.

"So far as it goes," nodded the stranger, tossing the stub of his cigarette into the sea; "but the best part of the story, the crowning achievement of Doctor Borgen's life, in fact, has not been told. I wonder if you would care to hear it?"

"Why not?" I asked, and looked at McKane.

Pat nodded, but whether in acquiescence or in order to get the sun out of his eyes, I could not tell.

The stranger walked over to the rail, and for a moment stood gazing out over the vast expanse of water beneath him. The giant Cunard liner, *S. S. Princess Maritza*, had just swung past Sandy Hook and, in a sea as smooth as glass, was gathering speed with every revolution of her engines as she headed for European waters beneath a blazing hot sun.

I propped my feet up on the rail and sprawled out comfortably in my steamer chair. The trip over, it appeared, was not going to be as monotonous as I had at first believed. It promised well at the start, at any rate, I thought, as I watched the stranger coil his lank form in an unoccupied chair in front of us.

"Although the newspaper story fails to mention the fact," he began, directing his hypnotic gaze at McKane, "the idea of the brain-graft originated not with Doctor Borgen but with a surgeon whom we will call Doctor X. To perfect this operation was Doctor X's life-long ambition and he worked and experimented for over thirty years with this end in view.

"Almost at the very beginning, however, he realized that he would be unable to carry on his experiments unassisted, and it was for this reason that he took his friend and colleague, Sven Borgen, into his confidence. With the latter's co-operation, the experiments were carried on in earnest over a period of many years, until at last science triumphed and the labors of the two surgeons were crowned with success.

"The brain-graft was an accomplished fact.

"The experiments, however, had been confined to the lower animals, and before revealing his secret to the world, Doctor X wanted to operate on subjects drafted from the human race.

"Think, gentlemen, what this operation, if successful, would mean to humanity. The alert brains of old men could be given a new lease on life in, say, the bodies of young, physically perfect lunatics, and the minds of geniuses could, by successive operations, be made to live on, perhaps—who knows—forever! It would only be a matter of time before the human race would become a race of supermen.

"But to continue: Doctor X, himself a very old man, had a son, a clean-limbed, strong-minded youngster about twenty-two years of age, who was attending a medical school in Copenhagen.

"One night shortly after Doctor X had brought the first phase of his experiments to a successful conclusion, he received a telegram informing him that his son had been severely injured in an automobile accident. The message came in the dead of night, long after Doctor X had retired, but he hurried into his clothes and caught the first train to Copenhagen.

"The boy had been taken to a hospital. He was suffering from a compound fracture of the skull and was not expected to live. Indeed, he regained consciousness only long enough after his father's arrival to realize that he was dying and to beg his parent, in the name of science, to use his body to carry on the brain-graft experiments. This Doctor X promised to do, and then, in spite of his heroic efforts to save the boy, his son died almost immediately afterwards of cerebral hemorrhage.

"It did not occur to Doctor X to break the promise he had made his boy. He was perfectly willing to sacrifice his own life if necessary for the advancement of science, and it seemed but natural to him that his son should want his body to be used for the same purpose.

"So he did not hesitate. He telegraphed Doctor Borgen, and then had his son's body removed to a colleague's private hospital in the same city. Then he made his will.

"When Borgen arrived several hours later Doctor X was ready for the operation, which was performed almost immediately afterward.

"I will not try to describe the operation itself. The technicalities would bore you. Suffice it to say, that a short time after the two hemispheres of Doctor X's brain had been grafted in the cranium of his dead son, the organs of the latter began to function. In short, gentlemen, the operation was a success, and the dead man was brought to life."

THE STRANGER struck a match on the heel of his shoe and applied the flame to a fresh cigarette. Then he looked up and his gaze encountered mine. I hastily averted my eyes.

I certainly did not believe his story, but there was, nevertheless, an indefinable something about him that inspired in me an odd feeling of repugnance and fear.

McKane yawned and reached for a cigar.

"Well," he remarked, "your story is not uninteresting, but if you expect me to swallow it, you will be disappointed. Not that I doubt your sincerity, but—well, how do I know your story is based on fact? I confess that it sounds very improbable to me. May I take the liberty of inquiring your name?"

"Certainly," said the stranger, and fixed his hypnotic gaze on my friend's face. "Before I died I was Doctor X's son." A sardonic smile twisted his thin red lips. "Now," he added slowly, "I am Doctor X."

British-American Exploring Party Discovers Ancient Temple of Moon God

EXCAVATIONS in the Mesopotamian desert by the University of Pennsylvania Museum in association with archeologists from the British Museum, have led to the discovery of a temple to the Moon God, Nanner, worshiped in ancient Ur about 2300 B. C.

Ur, a great city of ages before the arrival of the Chaldees, is said to be one of the most ancient centres of civilization in Mesopotamia. As the excavators have not yet reached the lowest strata, the earliest dated object goes back to 2900 B. C., though painted pots and stone implements have been brought to light, which are believed to be much older than that.

The temple was repaired by Nebuchadnezzar about 600 B. C., and the recently-discovered records are being used to check the biblical story of the degenerate ruler who was turned out to pasture.

The Tragic Story of a Greek Vase
Told in a Masterly Way

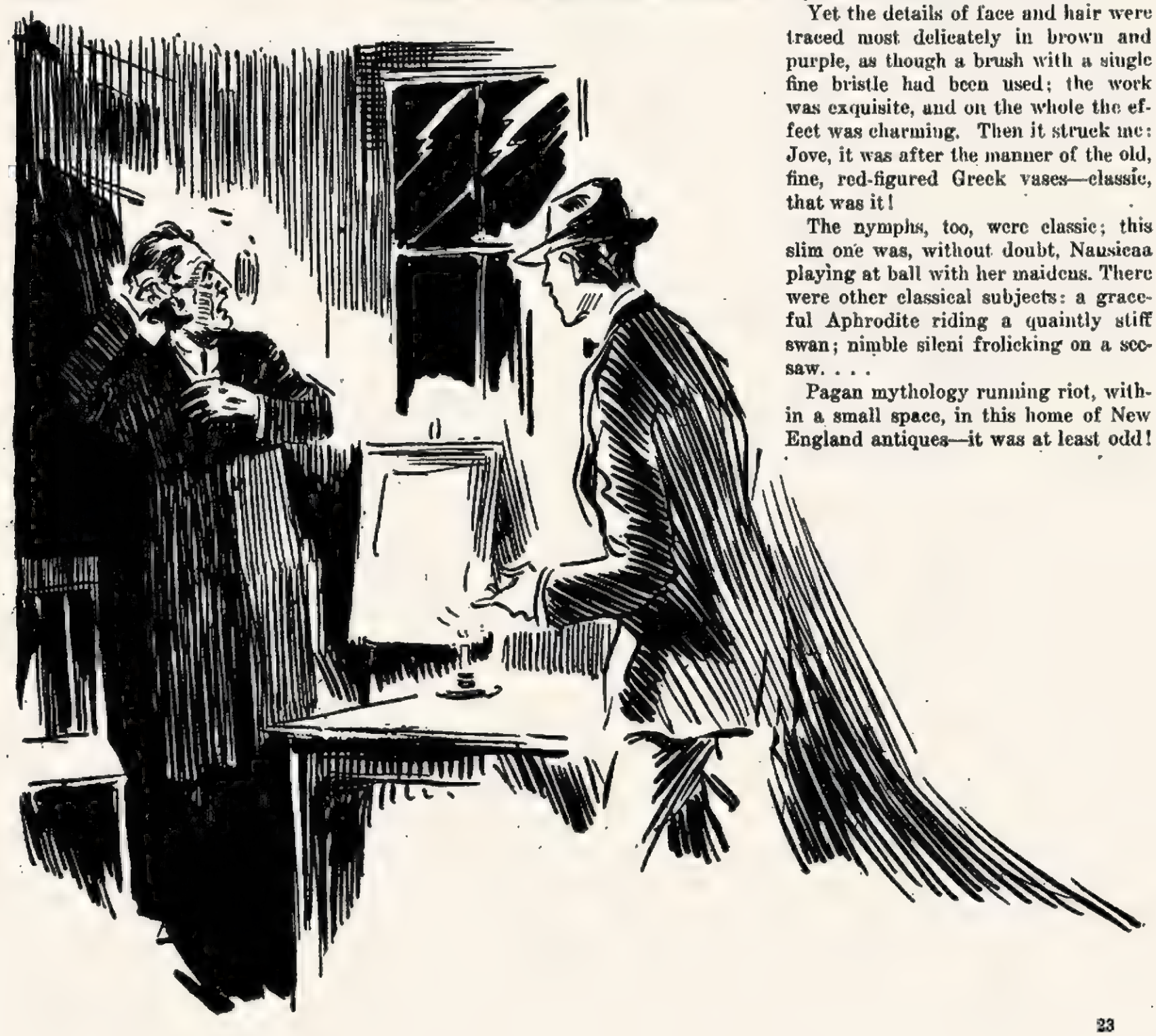
The Two Men Who Murdered Each Other

A Remarkable Novelette

By VALMA CLARK

IT WAS ON Cape Cod one August, while I was browsing through antique shops in quest of a particular kind of colonial andirons for one of our patrons, that I stumbled onto the Old Scholar.

There, in a white farmhouse back from the King's Highway, among a litter of old Cape lanterns and great bulging liqueur bottles of green and amber glass, ancient teakettles and brass door knockers and the inevitable bayberry candles, I came upon painted book ends of heavy wood on which bright orange nymphs disported themselves against a velvet-black background. A bizarre color scheme, was my first conventional reaction.



Yet the details of face and hair were traced most delicately in brown and purple, as though a brush with a single fine bristle had been used; the work was exquisite, and on the whole the effect was charming. Then it struck me: Jove, it was after the manner of the old, fine, red-figured Greek vases—classic, that was it!

The nymphs, too, were classic; this slim one was, without doubt, Nausicaa playing at ball with her maidens. There were other classical subjects: a graceful Aphrodite riding a quaintly stiff swan; nimble sileni frolicking on a seesaw. . . .

Pagan mythology running riot, within a small space, in this home of New England antiques—it was at least odd!

Here, where one sought the genuine old colonial— though usually in vain, to be sure—to come upon this curious classical twist!

Even as I wondered, my eye fell upon a fresh subject, and the wonder changed to genuine admiration and sharpened to a very keen curiosity concerning the artist who achieved such arresting beauty with such crude materials. It was a broken painting, like a Venus with a missing arm. It showed the head and shoulders of Pallas Athena and the head and shoulders of a youth who played to her on a double flute. The goddess' head, which still bore the warrior's helmet, was bent in a listening attitude toward the music, and her pose was one of relaxation and peace after fierce combat.

It was a quiet thing, with quiet, flowing lines, for all the unfinished ragged edge which cut the figures off just above the waist. Somehow, it held the dignity and sincerity of great religious art. And now I noticed that there were other identical Athenas, that the fragmentary painting recurred on fully half of the book ends: as though it were the motif of all his work, I thought—the one serious theme running through all these lighter themes.

"But only a man thoroughly steeped in Greek mythology—loving it—could do that—"

"Pardon, sir?" said the young woman who kept shop.

"This! It's rather remarkable. Who is he—tell me about him!" I begged of her impulsively.

"I can't tell you much. He lives alone over on the back shore, and he brings us these to sell. His name is Twining—'Tinker' Twining, they call him."

"But this broken thing—what does it mean?"

She shook her head.

"He never talks; only say he hasn't the pattern for the rest, and it would be sacrilege to finish it without the true lines."

"Hm—reverence and a conscience," I muttered; "rare enough these days. I'll take the pair of them. How much?"

"Five dollars."

"And a pair of the nymphs," I added, since it seemed absurdly cheap.

"Sorry, but we've only one of those. It's used as a door prop, you see."

"No, not a *door prop!*" I lamented. "But I'd use mine as book ends, and I'd put the Romantic Poets between them."

"I'll tell you,"—the girl turned suddenly helpful,—"you might leave an order with us for Mr. Twining to paint you one. He'd be glad to do it."

"Or I might take the order to Mr. Twining myself," I exclaimed eagerly. "I've a car outside and I've time to kill. How do I get to him?"

"But you can't drive. You follow the sand road to the end, and then take a narrow path across to the ocean side. It's three miles over, the only house—"

"No matter! I've a fancy to meet him Oh, I see by your face you wouldn't advise it."

"It's only that he's—something of a hermit," she hesitated. "He's a very courteous old gentleman, but no one ever visits him."

"Then it's time some one started, and I've a faculty for getting on with hermits," I assured her gaily.

I thanked her, found a quiet inn, parked my car for the night, and started on a late afternoon ramble for the back shore and a Mr. "Tinker" Twining.

I FOLLOWED a sand trail like a wind-white chalk line between growths of springy hog cranberry, scrub oak and pine—a most desolate and forsaken country—until at last I stepped out abruptly upon a high cliff over the Atlantic Ocean.

Clouds had sponged out the blue sky, and instead of the late sunlight there was a strange yellow glow over everything. All those light, bright Cape colors—turquoise blue and gay copper-gold and honey-yellow—had been dimmed.

The sea was very still, of dull purples and greens, and the broad cream beach, below the sand scrap upon which I stood, had a grayish tinge. Above me, on the highest point of the cliff and huddled too close to its shifting edge, was one of those low, weather-beaten, Cape houses. I climbed to it, and wading through beach grass and vines of the wild beach pea, came to the back door.

The house was quiet, and I had a glimpse of a scrupulously neat, old-style kitchen—cumbersome flatirons in a row and a brick oven built into the chimney—as I stood there hesitating.

Then, against a further window which framed the lowering sea and sky, I saw the profile of an old, white-haired man.

He sat at a work bench and he held a brush poised in his hand, but he was not painting. His head was up and he was listening—it was almost as though he were listening to that strange electric yellow that permeated all the air, was the queer thought I had. I was struck at once by the extreme delicacy and the fine-drawn suffering of the old man's face; indeed, the lines of that tragic profile might have been traced with the single fine bristle of his own brush, in those same delicate browns and purples.

Moreover, the setting was all wrong: the old, frail face was somehow not up to that sullen sweep of sky and ocean. It was as though an exquisite thing of beaten and fretted silver should be mounted alone upon a coarse expanse of dull burlap—a broad background that called for granite at least.

I tapped, and the old man stirred.

"Good afternoon," I called.

He came slowly to the door.

"They sent me from that antique place—the *Open Latch*. I'd like to get you to do me another book end."

"Book end?" he muttered.

"I hoped you might be willing to paint it and send it on to me."

"Ah yes." Clearly he was following me only with his eyes; with his soul he was still listening to his own thoughts.

I found myself puzzled as to how to reach him. A baffling aroma of archaism hung about this elderly man: breathed not only from his worn black suit, which was not of this day, but also from his manner and the very inflection of his voice, which were somehow reminiscent of the old school.

"The nymphs," I insisted; "the one of Nausicaa."

There I caught him. "Nausicaa—you knew?"

"Well, I guessed."

"They don't as a rule; to the general they are merely odd little maidens sporting at ball." His smile came out as pure gold filtered from the dross of suffering—a rare, lovable smile that immediately won me to the old gentleman. "I shall be happy to paint the Nausicaa for you, sir," he added formally, and awaited my further pleasure.

"The name," I said; "perhaps you'd better jot down my name and address."

"Of course—the name." Obediently he brought pad and pencil, and in a fine, scholarly hand wrote "Mr. Claude Van Nuys," with my New York address.

Absently, he permitted me to pay him and stood ready to bid me good afternoon.

Still I lingered. "The silent; and the goddess on the swan—Aphrodite, isn't she?"

"You pass, my boy,—grade A," he smiled.

"And the Pallas Athena—that's splendid work, only why—?"

"Ah, the Athena!" A flicker of pain touched the old man's face, and he grew reticent and vague again.

I would have given him up then, had not a terrific and absolutely unheralded blast of wind come to my assistance,

striking up the sand in swirling clouds about us.

"Whew!" I whistled, covering my face against the cut of that fine shot. "We're in for a gale, yes? I say—"

But I was shocked to dumbness by the look of strained and unadulterated horror on old Mr. Twining's face. He was breathing hard and backing into the house as though driven against the storm.

"A bad night," he muttered; "wind and a sea. . . . It was just such a night—" He rediscovered me with a start and with something approaching relief, I thought.

"But you couldn't stay out in this," he reasoned, more to himself than to me; "it then becomes necessary—Sir,"—he slipped easily into the role of courteous host—"will you accept the shelter of my roof until the storm passes?"

He waited for me to precede him into the house, saw me seated in the only comfortable chair in the dim living-room, and, having first excused himself, sat down at his work-bench and again took up his brush.

Slowly the room darkened. The old man forgot me and relapsed into mutterings, quivering under each shrill onslaught of the wind, pausing to listen for the moan of the surf below.

"You're deucedly close to this cliff," I ventured once, when a shower of sand swished against the window-pane.

"Eh—the cliff? Some winter nights she'll rise up to the very house and drench the glass of my windows—the sea will," he shuddered. "She's eating back—eating back; forty years ago, when I first came here, there was a front yard."

"But isn't it unsafe?"

"Perhaps," vaguely.

So he worked on until he could no longer see, and then he lit a candle, and turned to the tracing of a pattern from the colored plate of a book. There were several similar volumes at his elbow, and I dared to take one up and run it through. They were, as I had guessed, plates of the more famous Greek vases—mostly those of the red-figured period. "Douris—Euphronios—Hieron," I read aloud; "oh, and those exquisite old white lekythoi!"

The effect upon the old man was instantaneous. Those names—*Hieron, white lekythoi*—were the magic passwords to him! He turned to me as a starved dog might turn to food:

"Ah, you know them—the cup-painters!" And he loosed upon me such a flood of scientific enthusiasm and technicalities and dates, with such an undercurrent of reverence and love for the pure beauty of these old vases, as left me breathless, feeling that I had at last found a scientist and a poet rolled into one.

"You know, you know!" he exulted. "Now you recall the Douris Athena—"

"But I know nothing, really," I interrupted him, impelled to honesty by his own intense sincerity. "My knowledge of the classics is general. We deal only in period stuff at the House of Harrow, where I'm a buyer—English and French periods mostly—for a Fifth Avenue clientele. Oh, I once dipped into Greek art on my own account, picked up the patter, but beyond that—"

He would not have it.

"You speak the language," he insisted. "And do you know that it is nearly half a century since I've talked to anyone who speaks my own tongue—nearly half a century since I've met a man who's ever heard of Euphronios, the master cup-painter? Lord, how it takes me back!"

The old man laughed. The storm and his terrors were forgotten; the glow in his heart burned up in his cheeks like a fever.

"This—these books,"—his hand swept the colored plate,—"they're all I have left—the only link I allow myself."

"Do you mean—? With your passion for the classics, you shut yourself up alone here—starve yourself! But in God's name, man, why?"

"That's why—in God's name." The old man's head was bowed; for a moment the pain was back on his face. But that brittle zest flamed up in him again. "You questioned about my Athena! You are the first man who would comprehend. Wait!"

Smiling like a child with a secret, he tiptoed to a chest of drawers, brought out something wrapped in tissue paper. Very tenderly he unwound the papers, and produced before me the broken half of a red-figured cylix, with one handle attached but with the standard missing. He waited triumphantly for my exclamation.

"Why," I said lamely, "the interior is that same Athena with her flute-player. It seems—a very fine fragment—"

"Fine!"—he scorned the adjective. "Fine! Sir, this is the best of its kind—the aristocrat of the Greek vase. See! —The finished lines went something like this."

He caught up a pencil, laid the fragment flat on a sheet of white paper, and completed the broken figures of the Athena and the youth. I noted his hands as he sketched: fine, long-fingered hands, nervous, but sure at their work.

"You see?" he asked. "Now on the exterior of the cylix we have Athena mounting her quadriga after the battle. Is it not a contrast, that peaceful Athena and this Athena? Is he not, indeed, an artist of variety, the man who could do those two things, each so perfectly? You will note the horses—the bold, vigorous lines—the power and swing. It is naked, masculine drawing this—yes, scriptural. Euphronios—" Old Twining broke off, returned to his more precise exposition: "The other half of the cup—the exterior—showed Athena sending her spear into the giant Ankelados—"

"But where is the other half?" I wondered. "You must have seen it, since you hold the answer to the riddle."

"Yes," he returned slowly, "I have seen it; God knows I do hold the answer to the riddle. . . ."

But he came back to me—or rather to the beloved fragment of the cylix.

"The coloring!" he breathed. "That deep orange glow and the velvet-black and that fine gloss over all. . . . The secret of Greek potters, buried with them. Perfect to the very eyelashes. . ."

Sitting there, he lost himself in reverent admiration of the shard. He did not touch it—it was as though the fragment were too precious to handle; but he gave his soul to it through his eyes. He was oblivious to the wail of a rising wind and the thunder of a rising surf.

"It is," he announced quietly at last, "the half of a genuine, unpublished Euphronios."

I stared. "You say this is—an unpublished Euphronios?"

"Yes. The signature was on the other piece."

"But man alive, given that other piece,—and you must know where it is to be so familiar with it—this fragment is worth a king's ransom. A genuine whole Euphronios—why, the museums alone, bidding against each other—"

"The other half is gone," spoke the old man; "gone forever. But this piece itself is still worth more than a king's ransom; not in gold, but in the coin of knowledge—the knowledge it will give the world of Greek art."

His gray eyes widened to a vision; the poet was drowned in the farseeing scientist.

For that instant I felt myself in the presence of nobility—but the old man's dignity was abruptly shattered. With the rush as of an oncoming engine, the full blast of an Atlantic gale struck us: screamed and whined and groaned, and shook the old house until it rattled like a bag of loose bones.

In the same moment the rain came down in a deluge, swept the window-panes and beat a very devil's tattoo upon the roof. I flatter myself I am no coward, but I found myself clutching at the heavy work-bench for anchorage. By the wavering candle-light I discovered my host crowded back against the wall, his hands pressed to his eyes. He seemed to be in physical agony; it flashed to me that he was suffering a stroke of some kind.

I reached him in two steps:

"What is it? Sir—Mr. Twining!"

His mutterings were part of a disjointed prayer. I laid my hand on his shoulder, and suddenly he was clinging to me, like a child who finds an unexpected hand in the dark, and was speaking rapidly, incoherently:

"No, no, it's not the storm; it's the things it brings up here, in my head—images—scenes no human being should have. . .staged. I live it over again—over and over—like Macbeth. Don't leave me—*don't!* It's His will. He sends you, and the storm holds you here—impossible for you to reach the village this night. You shall stay with me, be my first guest in forty years. You shall hear my tale—and judge me."

"Yes, yes," I soothed him, drawing him to a chair, "of course I'll stay."

III.

HE subsided then, his head dropped to his arms which he had flung out on the bench before him; as the wind died down a little, he slowly regained complete control of himself.

"It's mad of me," he sighed, facing me at last; "sometimes I fear I am growing a little mad. But I've a fancy to tell to you—an impartial stranger—the story of how I came by the Euphronios fragment. But you must be hungry; you shall first have supper with me."

He became again the solicitous but unobtrusive host. He moved expertly about the kitchen, set a meticulous table with white linen cloth and pewter utensils, and served me clam broth out of a blue bowl, and brown bread and honey, and some sort of a flower wine of which Horace might have sung. The old man himself supped on three steamed clams and a glass of cold water. Yet he was the perfect host with his fine, aloof hospitality.

At last we settled to the story. Sitting there on opposite sides of his work-bench, with the storm rising and falling in intermittent gusts, and with the broken fragment of the vase between us, its colors glowing out like black onyx and orange coral under the sputtering light of the candle, we dropped back into the old man's past:

"I was abroad," he began, "in the middle of the eighties, on a year's leave of absence from my college, and with me was my friend—Lutz, let us call him—Paul Lutz. I may say here that I had no right to play friend to him, for at heart I despised him—despised his methods, his creeds. One of my college colleagues, a younger man than I, he seemed to have taken a liking to me.

"It was odd, for he was of a wealthy family, and beyond our common interest in archeology and classical subjects—an interest which was rather a fad with him, I suspected—we were at opposite poles. He was shrewd, brilliant even, but how shall I describe him—he had thick fingers. He was the handsome, spoiled, Byronic type: a full-blooded dark man, part Jew. I have sometimes wondered if I did not keep him by me to watch him, for we were rivals in the same field, even in the same little department, and in those days I made finger exercises of the theories of other scholars and dreamed of striking a great new chord of my own. I wanted fame, you see, recognition, and I was suspicious of Lutz's brilliance. I dare say the basis of many apparent friendships in this world is really a strong rivalry and a mutual suspicion.

"Lutz and I were rivals in more ways than on. There was. . . . a young lady in our college town; she received us both. Her name—it would do no harm to tell it now—was Lorna Story, and she was like her name, a fine, silver-gray girl. She had a beautiful mind. . . and a light shining through her gray eyes that was like the haunting line of a poem. . ."

The old man sat silent for a time, as he had been silent before the fine beauty of his Greek vase, and his old, frail face was lit by the same inner glow. He moved to take up from the base of the candlestick a hurt night moth, and, cupping it gently in his two hands, opened the window a crack and released it. Then he continued:

"Lutz and I were in Athens together in the spring in the interest of our college museum, which was then in its infancy. We had at our joint disposal a fund for any valuable specimens, and we haunted the excavation fields and the markets for antiquities. It was the merest chance which led us to the Acropolis at the time they had just started on the work of clearing out the debris which dated before the destruction of the Persians. And it was the merest chance which took us to the spot at the moment the workmen brought to light the vase, in two pieces.

A vase by the potter Euphronios—and the signature was actually visible through the coating of white earth deposits—here in this débris which went back to the days before the Persian sacking in 480! Now Euphronios had long been fixed at a date considerably later. That difference in dates was important: the inferences that followed—why, I had hit upon a tremendous, an epoch-making discovery! I saw my path to scholarly fame opening up before me.

"I talked with the young Greek who was directing operations there, and secured his promise that I should examine the specimen when it had been thoroughly cleaned. Lutz edged close to me, and I saw that he, too, was excited by the vase though concealing his excitement under an air of indifference. But I had no time for Lutz. I got away from him. I pursued those inferences for miles through the streets of Athens, and then tested out my conclusions in the classical library out at the American School. There was no error in my facts, no flaw in my logic.

"I walked the streets longer—hours longer—bit by bit built up my article. Then, in the flush of masterly achievement, I turned back to the small hotel where we were stopping.

"I opened the door of our room to find Lutz bent low over the table. He was gloating over something:

"'You beauty! And to fit with never a flaw—'

"'Good Lord!' I discovered. 'It's the vase!'

"'Right, old boy,' Lutz grinned up at me. 'I've finished giving her a bath with aqua fortis—oh, my caution was extreme, never fear. Now what do you think?'

"Think! What *could* I think? The colors were as you see them now, startling like black and orange enamel. Forgetful of theories, I fell into rhapsodies with him. Lutz caressed the glossy, painted surface with his plump hands and fairly purred; I darted from the tracery of face and garments to the Greek letters of the signature and sipped the honey of our rare find after my own fashion.

"We were like two eager boys who have come upon Captain Kidd's treasure. We dropped into heated argument, I recall: Lutz preferred the strong, battling Athena who hurled her spear at the giant, while I maintained that the quiet Athena, who sat with her head bowed to the music of her flute player, was the greater art. Laughingly, I took possession of my favorite half of

the vase and left to Lutz his savage goddess.

"Then the serious significance of the vase and my intended article intruded, and I returned to earth.

"'But how under heaven did you come by it, Lutz?'

"He laughed, cast an apprehensive glance toward the hallway:

"'It's a long story. I say, will you lock that door behind you? Thanks. Whether that Greek was a fool that he should let this slip through his fingers, or whether it was a question of drachmas or whether it was a little of both—idiocy *and* greed—what does it matter? The vase is here—mine. Well then—'

"'But it belongs by right to the Greek government—the Museum of the Acropolis,' I protested, weakly enough.

"'Naturally, I know,' he smiled; 'but it does not go to the Greek government nor to the Acropolis. Now why quibble, Twining? You know those things are done every day.'

"I did know: in spite of laws, valuable classical pieces were continually turning up in the States; indeed, our own college had purchased specimens of doubtful past.

"'How much then?'

"'Guess!' And he named a sum that startled me.

"'It's a lot,' I grumbled; 'and look here, Lutz, I expect to be consulted at least in the disposal of the fund. Still, anything within reason for it . . . a superb nucleus of our collection. . .'

"Then the thrill of my discovery caught me again: 'Its value is greater than you realize, Lutz. You saw nothing strange in finding a vase by Euphronios in the Persian rubbish? Why, wake up, man! If Euphronios and his contemporaries lived and painted before the Persians, it simply means that the whole chronology of Greek vases must be pushed back half a century. And that's going to mean that Greek painting developed before Greek sculpture, instead of the contrary, as we've always believed. Now do you see! Do you begin to see how this one small vase is going to revolutionize all of our concepts of Greek art? Why, it's colossal! When my article appears—when it's published and quoted and discussed and rediscussed in all the periodicals—'

"'Hold on!' commanded Lutz. 'We'll not make a splurge of this vase yet. You'll hang off on that article a while—promise me?'

"'I don't follow you,' I returned stiffening. 'Why should I make promises—?'

"'But I insist that you shall!'

"'And I reply that I won't!'

"Lutz's black eyes narrowed, his face tightened to an expression of hard shrewdness. 'As I see it, your theory depends upon your establishing the fact that the vase came out of that Persian junk; unless you can guarantee that, the whole theory goes smash. I think you'll find no one who'll swear to that. You'd have to swear to it alone. And if it came to a show down, it would be your one word against our several words. Since the thing you're trying to prove is contrary to accepted ideas, the public would find it easier to believe us.'

"'But the vase was taken from the Persian débris; you yourself saw it, this very morning!'

"'Perhaps.'

"'Yet you would—lie?'

"'Perhaps.'

"'But why? Can't you grasp it? It means,' I reiterated patiently, 'a big discovery concerning Greek art, and Greek art is the basis of other arts. You wouldn't keep that knowledge from the world? Oh, you're afraid of losing—but whether the vase goes to a Greek museum or to our museum, is nothing compared to the fact it will establish. You simply don't understand!'

"'It's you,' said Lutz softly, 'who misunderstands. Did I neglect to tell you that I paid for the vase with a check on my own bank?'

"'You didn't draw on the fund?'

"'No.'

"'Why—what—?'

"'So you see, old top, you haven't been getting me quite straight: this cylix is *my* find!'

"'What do you mean?'

"He colored then, beneath his dark skin. 'It's not for the college museum; it's for—my own private museum. I mean to make it the start of the very finest private collection in the States.' He held out his hand for my half of the cup.

"But I drew back, hugged the fragment against my breast. 'Do you stand there and tell me that you're not a scientist at all, but a greedy sensualist? You will remember, Lutz, that you're here for the college, sent by the college—'

"'And I've worked like the devil for the college!' he broke in roughly. 'I'll continue to work for the college through all the regular channels. But this thing's not regular; it's most—irregular; and the irregularity is my own doing. I'll keep this vase for myself, and I'll suffer my own damnation for it. If you'll kindly hand over that piece—'

"Then I flared: 'I'll do nothing of the sort. If you think you can gag me to silence—force me to sit still and blink at your dirty greed—No, I'll keep this half as a guarantee to us both that you'll see the light of day and do the right thing!'

"We had it hot then. He had paid for it with his own money, had not touched a penny of the college fund; he had me there.

"But I swore, if he insisted upon taking the fragment from me, that I should report him to Greek authorities who watched that no Greek treasures should go from the country without government sanction.

"That held him. He desisted, even tried to square himself with me. Probably Lutz merely delayed the issue until we should be safely out of Greece. For myself, I was firmly resolved that I should finally prevail upon him; and I did not doubt that I should publish my article and either return the vase to Greece or hand it over to my college museum.

"Meantime, we sailed for home, taking passage, as we had planned, on a small trading vessel that wound a leisurely circle about the Atlantic islands and certain South American ports before it brought up and dropped anchor in New York Bay. The truce still held. Each of us guarded jealously his half of the vase, and each kept aloof from the other.

"It was a childish situation. I tried to tell myself that he was only a willful, spoiled boy, acting in character, but my secret hatred of him grew out of all proportion to the quarrel, which was serious enough, truly.

IV.

"THERE was an implicit understanding between us that the reckoning would come when the ship landed us on home soil. But the ship was destined not to land.

"We were in mid-Atlantic, some eight hundred miles off the Cape Verde Islands and bound for Porto Seguro, when the crash came. It was night, with a heavy gale blowing, and at first I thought the sudden wrench which almost jerked me from my upper berth was a particularly violent wave. Then a grinding and shuddering through all the ship's frame and an abrupt cessation of the engine's throbbing, pulled me stark awake. I hung over the edge of my berth:

"'What is it?'

"'Don't know,' yawned Lutz below, struggling from luxurious sleep. 'Better find out—what? 'S a damn nuisance—'

"I groped for the light, and we got into clothes, the ship pitching now so that it was impossible to keep a footing. We spoke no further word, but Lutz paused in drawing on his trousers to take

from beneath his pillow the box which contained his half of the precious vase; and I reached for my own piece, and kept it by me while I finished lacing my shoes. Each of us eyed the other suspiciously; and Lutz was quick to follow me when, with my treasure, I mounted to the ship's deck.

"The little boat wallowed there in the trough of the sea, a dead and passive thing. With its heart stilled, it seemed strangely aloof from the wild sounds of the storm and the shrill cries of men—as a clock which has stopped ticking off the time is aloof from the currents of noisy life which flow past it.

"Apparently the crew had gone wild, and the captain, too, had completely lost his head, for we passed him sobbing on the deck, unable to give us a coherent word. The men were fighting like freshmen in a college rush over life-boats which they were attempting to lower to the water.

"'No chance here,' growled Lutz; 'Lord, let's get out of this mess!'

"I trailed him forward, battling against the wind and the waves which broke over the deck.

"Once I stumbled over a big brute who was on his knees blubbering like a child. I shook him:

"'What did we hit?'

"'Reef. She's a-goin' down, sir—a-goin' down. May the good, kind Lord have mercy—'

"Another time I might have pitied this snivelling creature who could not die like a man, but now I stepped over him, intent upon keeping an eye upon Lutz, even as he was intent upon keeping an eye upon me. Lutz was far forward, clinging to a rail, staring over the ship's side. I reached him, clung with him, and followed his gaze.

"There below us, close against the ship, bobbed a little white dory, looking as frail as an eggshell upon the dim, surging mass of waters; it had been launched probably in the first wild moment, and then abandoned for the heavier, more seaworthy boats.

"'A chance,' spoke Lutz; 'I'll—risk it!'

"He turned to me then, and his eye rested speculatively upon the pocket of my coat which held the vase.

"'No you don't!' I said sharply. 'I'll take that risk with you.'

"We stood measuring each other. It was a contest of wills that threatened any moment to degenerate into a physical struggle. "Oh, I see you are thinking it unlikely"— Twining's long-fingered, nervous, old hand shaded his eyes from the candlelight—"that we two men should have stood there wrestling over a Greek vase when any moment threatened to plunge us into eternity. But if you can not believe that, young man, then you know nothing of the collector's passion or the scholar's passion.

"We measured each other, I say—oh, quietly. All about us was the terror of the storm—the same wash and slap and snarl that you hear now about this very house; and concentrating upon him, probing him, my heart filled with intense hatred of him, slowly and surely, as a jug that is held under a single stream fills with water—such a hatred as threatened to overflow—a *killing* hatred! There, on just such a night as this, murder was born in me—murder, I tell you!

"The crisis passed. Unexpectedly Lutz gave in:

"'Oh, all right; together still—for a little time—'

"A wave drenched us. We recovered, strained into the darkness to determine whether the little dory had been swamped. But no, she still rode the sea, miraculously right side up.

"'Come along then!' snapped Lutz. 'There's no time to waste.'

"Our time was indeed short. We gathered what store of things we could together, and since the decks of the ship were by this ominously close to the water, the drop into the tossing small dory was easier than it might have been. Lutz took the oars. Some way he had maneuvered us about the bow of the ship, and now we were clear of the sinking vessel, carried swiftly away from it by the sea.

"The rest is a blur. I recall dark shapes—bits of bobbing wreckage—and the white circle of an empty life saver. I did not see the ship go down. One minute there were lights; and the next minute there was darkness over all the ocean, and the human voices had subsided into the voices of wind and water. For the sea itself claimed all my attention, and held it.

"That night was a business of separate, marching waves, with a separate prayer for each wave, that it would not break at the wrong moment. A hundred times I shut my eyes and abandoned hope, and a hundred times I opened them and found us safe. Lutz, an athlete in his day, hung onto the oars, but he was powerless against that surge of water. It was only a miracle which kept us afloat. Our little dory rode the waves like a cork, but still she rode them.

"With the breaking of a sullen dawn, the wind died. The rain settled to a steady downpour, and the waves, as the day wore on, subsided to the long, low rollers that last for hours after such a gale. The gray sea was a vast, unbroken stretch without a trace of life; perhaps the miracle that had saved our frail boat had not held for those heavier dories . . .

"Anyway, to cut it short, we drifted that day without sight of a single vessel. Wet through and numb with cold, I was glad to take a shift at the oars while Lutz slept. Our hastily gathered provisions were found to consist of half a pail of soda biscuits, a lantern without oil, some miscellaneous ropes and tarpaulins—and that was all!

"We ate sparingly of the biscuits, drank rain water caught in the cracker pail. Our boat, we discovered, was leaking badly through seams in the bow; so we crowded as much weight to the stern of the craft as we could, and I was kept busy bailing out the water.

"Late in the afternoon, when the situation looked worst, we perceived a black speck upon the horizon. The speck grew into a pile of dark rocks—bare and uninhabited, we saw, as the current carried us close. Somehow, we gained the sheltered side of the island, and there, in a narrow inlet, achieved a landing. The mass of rocks was perhaps fourteen hundred feet long and half as wide. It rose abruptly from the sea, a lonely, desolate pile. The only life was sea gulls, insects and spiders, and a few fish in the surrounding waters. We were together there on the island for four days.

"Through all those four days, half-starved and suffering from exposure as we were, Lutz and I nursed each his own half of the cylix and kept a watchful eye upon the other half. The strain of the situation grew intolerable. Now through what follows I don't know how to account for myself; whether it was a fever working in my blood—but no, I was coldly, calculatingly sane as I laid my plans. Yet before that crisis I had never in my life been a vicious man.

"You see, figuring our location from the ship's map as near as I could remember it, I came to believe that this solitary rock was one visited and described by Darwin in his investigation of volcanic islands. If it was the island I believed it to be, then it lay off the ocean lines and was very rarely passed by ships. Our chance of being rescued, if we stayed on the island then, was slight.

"I did not mention these deductions to Lutz. Nor, after Lutz had eaten our last cracker, did I tell him of my own small reserve supply of concentrated meat, which I carried always in my pocket at that time to save the trouble of too frequent meals. At first I did not myself comprehend the drift of my own thoughts.

"Then, on the second night, while Lutz slept under a tarpaulin and while I fought off a twisting hunger, I saw the event quite clearly. Lutz would be the first to succumb to weakness; I would hold on longer than he could. The boat was our best risk, but in its present leaky condition it was unseaworthy for two men. Now *one man,* huddled back in the stern. . . . there was just a chance. And the vase—the *whole* vase—in my possession; and my article secure. . . .

"Deliberately I broke off a piece of the dried meat, which I had not touched until that moment.

"Perhaps I shold have weakened in my course and divided my slender provision with him—I do not know. But on the following morning Lutz, sprawled on his stomach over the rock's edge, with his pocketknife tied to a pole, managed to spear a small fish. He did not share with me. Desperate for food, he devoured the thing raw, and the sight nauseated and hardened me.

"I begrudged him the strength he was storing up; but I did not doubt the issue. For all his athletic build, Lutz was soft with soft living. Moreover, my will was stronger than his. So I ate sparingly of my dried meat while Lutz slept, and I maintained a patient watch over the Euphronios fragment which was not yet in my hands.

"Meantime, I kept up some pretense of friendship and good cheer with him. He insisted upon piling up wet drift wood for a fire in case a ship should come our way, and I encouraged him to the effort; though we had no matches, he thought he might manage a spark, and while I knew that this rock was too soft to serve as flint, I agreed with him.

"I watched him burn up energy and grow hourly weaker, and waited. . . . waited. . . .

V.

"MURDER was in the air between us, and since those things breed, I wondered that a murdering hatred of me did not spring up in his heart to match my own, and that he did not tackle me there on the rocks and fight it out with me.

"But no—though I sometimes fancied he looked at me oddly, he remained amiable. Lutz was as determined as I to have his way about the vase; beyond that, he was still my friend in his loose, selfish way—my friend as much as he had ever been. As my friend, Lutz, gross and unscrupulous as he was, could never have guessed the thing that was going on in my mind. That was my great sin, the crime that makes me doubly cursed: it was my friend whom I betrayed—a man who was bound to me in friendship.

"When, on the fourth day, the rain ceased, and a hot, tropical sun blazed out and dried up the pools in the rocks which had furnished our water, I felt myself slipping. The heat on these naked rocks was worse than the chilling rain. A fever grew in me. I could not afford to wait longer. While my companion drowsed in a kind of stupor, I gathered a few things into the boat, stowed my own precious fragment in a concealed nook far up in the bow, and then moved cautiously toward Lutz.

"A dizziness seized me. . . . but I went on. . . . I had rehearsed it all fifty times, you understand, so that I knew every move by heart; and though my memory of the actual events is not clear, I must have gone through with it as I had planned. I suppose I may have awakened him in shoving off the boat, for I have a hazy recollection of a fight.

"And when I came to, alone in the dory, on a calm blue sea, I felt a soreness at my throat, and afterward I was to find black finger marks there, which I carried with me for days. Perhaps I had actually killed him, left him in a heap on the rocks—I couldn't remember. But whether I had murdered him outright with my own hands or not, it did not matter; I had murdered him as surely by abandoning him there on that forgotten island and taking the one chance for myself. I was a murderer by intent and by cold calculation—a murderer of my friend and colleague!"

"And your own fate?" I prompted old "Tinker" Twining gently.

"I was picked up several days later, in a state of semi-consciousness, by a small passenger steamer, just as I had foreseen. In the long voyage home, I lived through nightmares. I felt impelled to confess the truth and to beg the Captain to turn back for Lutz, but I knew that it was now too late. I suffered alone as I deserved to suffer.

"There were nights when I felt my fingers sinking into the flesh of his throat. . . . other nights when I looked at my own hands and could not believe it. My half of the vase—did I tell you that I must somehow have failed to secure Lutz's half, strong as my determination had been, since only this fragment was found in the dory, hidden under the bow where I had placed it? This piece, though I hated it in my reaction, I kept always before me as the reminder, the sackcloth and ashes of my sin.

"The steamer landed me in Boston, and I wandered up here to the Cape. Since the *Agricola* had gone down with all souls reported lost, I was dead to the world. That was well, for, having murdered my friend for a piece of pottery, I was unfit for human society. The penalty of my crime followed as a natural sequence: to drop out of the world and the work I loved; to read no books and to take no periodicals on my own subject; in short, to give up the thing that was most vital to me. That would be prison for me—a prison worse than most criminals ever know.

"I found this remote house, got in touch with my lawyer at home, and, having pledged him to secrecy, arranged that my small, yearly income should be paid regularly to a T. Twining at this address. I had no close relatives, and the old lawyer has long since died, leaving my affairs in the hands of an incurious younger partner. There was no hitch.

"So I settled here, and eked out my income with this painting. Though I fixed my own terms of imprisonment, I have lived up to them. In all those forty years I have permitted myself no inquiries and I have heard no news of anyone I ever knew in the old days. I have virtually buried myself alive.

"Ah, you are thinking it wrong of me to have buried, too, the half of this valuable cylix, since, fragment though it is, it would have been sufficient to establish the fact. Perhaps it *was* wrong. But, don't you see, I could establish nothing without first revealing my identity and giving my word as a scientist that the shard came from the Persian debris? That way lay danger—the danger of being drawn back into the old life; there, too, lay honor for me who deserved nothing but contempt.

"And always in the background there was Lorna Story. No, the temptations were too many; I could not risk it. But I have bequeathed that knowledge to posterity; I have left a written confession and a statement. Tell me—you have recently come out of the world—you don't think it will be too late after my death, do you?"

Though I had some shadowy idea of what extensive excavations and what far-reaching discoveries had been made in the classical world of recent years, I assured the old man that it would perhaps not be too late. I had not the heart to rob him of the little outworn theory that he hugged close.

"And so," he concluded his story, "you see before you a murderer! Your verdict would be—?"

"But how can you be sure?" I countered. "If you slipped up on the vase, you may have slipped up on other details of your program. Besides, his

chance on the island was as good as yours in a leaking dory. Who shall say?"

Old Twining merely shook his head. He returned again to the glowing fragment on the table between us.

"Ah, you are thinking that the vase is my consolation—that I wanted to keep it. And perhaps I did," he owned wistfully. "I swear to you I abhor the deed it stands for, but I can no more help loving it in itself—"

He lost himself, wandered off once more into the fine points of his treasure.

But the wind rose up again, and the old man's head dropped to his hands. I was with him all that night and I saw him suffer the tortures of an eternally damned soul with a razor blade conscience.

The storm over, he was the kindly, considerate host when he bade me goodbye on the following morning. I left him with the feeling that I had been in the presence of as fine a gentleman as I had ever met; that his story of the preceding night was utterly incongruous to the man as he was. It would be a physical impossibility, I protested, for that gentle old scholar to harm an insect.

His mind had wandered at times: could it be that he was suffering some kind of an hallucination, the result, perhaps, of an overacute conscience? I believed there was some factor to his story which I had not got hold of, and I promised myself to visit him again.

VI.

BUT time passed. I was abroad in England and in France. Then two years later, back again in New York, I picked up the missing link in the old scholar's story:

It was inevitable, I suppose, that, as buyer for the House of Harrow, I should sooner or later stumble into Max Bauer. At a private sale I lazily bid against the wealthy collector for a jade bowl and good-naturedly lost to him. I talked with him, and when he urged me to dine with him that evening and see his treassures, I assented.

I don't know why I accepted his invitation, for I did not like the man; but I was mildly curious about his collection, and alone in the city in midsummer, I welcomed any diversion.

So he dined me and wined me—especially the latter—to repleteness in the ornate dining-room of his luxurious apartment, which was after the manner of a banquet hall. I watched him pick apart the bird that was set before him, and found something cannibalistic in the performance; and I watched him again over a rich mousse, and liked him less and less. His hand was always upon a bottle; he gave me no peace—urged things upon me, made a show of his food and his service.

The meal over, still keeping the decanter by him, he trailed me through rooms littered with oriental junk. He bragged and boasted, told the history of this piece and that: how he had robbed one man here and tricked another there. His voice thickened, as his enthusiasm grew, and I turned thoroughly uncomfortable and wondered when I could break away.

Clearly the man attracted few friends of a caliber to appreciate his art treasures, for under my perfunctory approval, he became increasingly garrulous, until at last he invited me into the inner shrine, the small room which held his most private and precious possessions.

We stopped before a water color painting of a slim girl in gray.

"My wife," said old Bauer with a flourish; "her last portrait."

I turned incredulously from that white-flower face, with its fine, subtle smile, half-ironical and half-tired, to my gross-featured host—and I shuddered.

"A handsome woman," he mumbled; "picture doesn't do her justice. Face so-so, but a body. . . . a body for an artist to paint. . . ."

I looked away from him—followed the gray girl's eyes to the object below her upon which she ironically smiled: it was a red-figured Greek vase, and I remember thinking that this man must have changed—that his taste, his very life, must have degenerated, like the retrogression from the fine to the decadent, since such a girl had married him.

Then something familiar in the vase struck me—like the broken pattern of a forgotten dream. . . . It was the fragment of a vase, the half of a cylix, on which an orange goddess stood with uplifted spear.

"Ah," I breathed, "the Athena—Euphronios!"

"So you're up to it!" chuckled old Bauer. "Not many of 'em are. Classic stuff: I used to aim for a collection of the pure Greek, but I've grown out of that; not that I wouldn't have achieved it if my taste hadn't changed, y'understand, for I'm generally successful—I get the things I set out for. This"—he scowled at the vase—"is my one failure. But there's a story"—he poured himself another whisky (to my infinite relief forgot to press me) "want to hear it, eh?"

I looked at him carefully: the plump fingers; the full, sensual lips; the dark skin and the nose—probably Jewish blood. What was the name?—Lutz, that was it!

Decidedly I did want to hear his story!

VII.

"MY ONE failure," he emphasized it, slumping into a chair. "Not my fault, either; the fault of a stuffy old fool. He doted on me, played the fatherly role, and I tolerated him as you will such folks. I cribbed a lot off of him; I was keen on the classics at that time, and he knew a thing or two.

"Besides, he was sweet on Lorna, and you never could tell about her—odd tastes; it was best to keep track of him. We traveled together for the college—you'd never guess I'd been a college professor in my day, would you? I happened onto this thing quite by luck—a genuine Euphronios, broken clean in two pieces. I wanted it, and I managed it. This fellow—old Gooding—had a notion of turning it in to the college museum; he had some other fool's idea of proving something-or-other—a rare old bird, a pedant, you understand. It was a shaky business; I'd no intention of publishing my Euphronios at this time. But he was set—you'd never believe how set!—and since I couldn't afford to stir up a row there in Athens, I humored him.

"Once we were clear of Greece—once we struck home ground—But we never struck home ground on that ship. She went down!"—with a flourish of his glass. "Yes, dammit all, regular desert island stuff. We were hung up on a rock in mid-ocean, the two of us, old Gooding hugging tight to half the vase, and me nursing the other half. Can't say I ever was more damned uncomfortable in my life.

"He had this eccentric idea of honor and he had it hard like religion, and he hung on like a bull dog. It was war between us. Oh, he doted upon me right enough, still insisted upon the paternal role, but I'd no intention of letting him pull this thing."

Again Bauer fumbled for the bottle, spilled whisky into his glass.

"The old idiot—you'd think he'd've seen what he was driving me to, but not him. I had a couple of matches in my pocket—I'd held out on him, y'understand. And I'd built up a pile of driftwood for a signal fire to the first ship that passed. But I'd no notion of saving *him* too. No, I had a contrary notion of setting him adrift in the dory.

"Oh, it was easy: he'd gone weaker than a cat, y'understand—all gray matter an' no physh—physhique, ol' Cheever Gooding. I'd take my chances on the

island with a heap of dry wood an' two matches for a li'l bonfire, an' with the c-cup, both pieces of it safe.

"*Murder?*"—Bauer laughed. " 'S'n ugly word, eh?" He pursued with an uncertain finger an injured fly which crawled across his trousers leg. "Bah, they say this man kills for hate, that for love—all good, noble motives. But your true collector—you 'n' me—kills for a c-cup. Killing's natural—th'easiest thing in the world—when you're preshed for time.

" 'N I was preshed for time, see? There was a ship out there—I saw the smoke. I got him into the dory, but it was a fight; there was life in the ol' bird yet, though the sun'd laid him low. Leaky boat—not much chance for him—still I'd be sure. I choked him gently—oh, quite gently—like thish,"— Bauer demonstrated by crushing the fly very thoroughly between his thumb and forefinger—"till the breath was gone from him. Then I looked for th'other half c-the vashe—couldn't find it. The smoke was close—couldn't wait. P'raps he's hid it in the rocks, I shay. So I shoves him off, an' the tide carries him 'way from the ship's smoke—bob-bobbin' away.

"I runs up an' sends my twigs a-blazin' to the sky. 'N I searches everywhere for the c-cup—in every crack—an' no luck! Guns shalute—ship's comin'; li'l dory bobs off there a mere sun spot; still no luck. Can you beat it? All my work for nothing! 'Cause, see, I'd murdered him—an' what for? Damn him, his skin's too cheap—

"Say, you're not leavin'? My one failure—I've had everything else: Lorna an' thish here c-c'lection—everything! But this one li'l broken c-cup—too bad—too bad—"

I left him caressing the vase with his hands as old "Tinker" Twining had caressed it with his eyes. But before I went, my gaze fell again upon the painting of Bauer's wife, and I remembered the other man's words for her: "A beautiful mind, and a light shining through her gray eyes that was like the haunting line of a poem."

"Body love and soul love," I muttered.

Bauer sought me out the following morning.

"What did I tell you last night?" he asked.

I told him briefly.

"Fiction!" he shrugged with an uneasy laugh. "I get to running on—You'll—forget it?"

I was ready for him.

"Yes," I agreed, "I'll forget it—on one condition: that you run down to the Cape with me to—pass judgment on an antique; to give me your honest, expert advice—free of charge."

He consented at once, the connoisseur in him aroused.

VIII.

SO WE came down to the Cape on a clear blue morning after rains.

I made inquiries at the village concerning old "Tinker" Twining, and was prepared for what I found. I had come in time, a woman told me; she was troubled about him, though, since he would allow no one to stop in the house and care for him.

We took the trail over to the back shore; and I held Bauer off, answered his questions vaguely. It was a different day from that sullen one on which I had first walked this path: an exquisite morning, requiring you to capture the shine of each separate leaf—the upward-tossed, silver poplar leaves and the varnished oak leaves—if you would adequately describe it.

This meeting I had planned solely for the sake of the old scholar; if, in aiding Twining to clear his conscience, I also cleared the conscience of Max Bauer, that I could not help. But Bauer, I assured myself, had no conscience; one way or the other, it would not matter to him.

Still, it was a situation without parallel, I thought: two men, each living, and each believing himself to have murdered the other. And to bring those two men together, face to face, would be smashing drama!

But life is seldom as spectacular as we anticipate; my fireworks fizzled. Beyond a stretch of beach grass,—running silver under the sunlight—and humped up there precariously over sands, stood the same little rusty gray house. The door was half open, and the work-bench was deserted. We found the old man in a bedroom over the sea, lying in a black walnut bed under a patchwork quilt.

He was propped up on pillows, and the worn face was silhouetted against the ocean, blue today with pale sweepings, and flowing out to silver under the sun. The elderly scholar was delirious, his mind wandering over that old sin; he was still paying the penalty for a murder of the imagination.

"My friend," he muttered; "the man who was bound to me in friendship—certain death—"

"Listen!" I said. "This is Max Bauer, the man you thought you killed! You didn't murder him; you only *thought* you did. He's here safe—look!"

But the other did not grasp it; only repeated the name "Max Bauer," and turned away with a long shudder.

Then Bauer was chattering at my shoulder:

"*Gooding*—old Cheever Gooding himself!"

"Perhaps that's what *you* called him—the man you strangled—It's no use—no earthly use; he's still under the illusion—we can never make it clear to him now."

"But how—?" I turned impatiently at Bauer's insistence, gave him curtly and succinctly, in four sentences, the clues he had missed.

He sat there. "So he tried to murder me! The old—skunk!"

And later, "B'God," he whispered, "how he's gone! A shadow. . . ."

I looked at Bauer, sitting corpulent and gross.

"Yes," I replied, "a shadow."

But already Bauer's eyes had roved from Twining to a thing on the quilt which he had missed in the patchwork colors, a thing of orange and black.

"Lord, it's the missing half!" he exclaimed, and now there was genuine feeling in his voice.

I stood between Bauer and that object, guarding Twining's treasure. And still I tried to give old Twining back his clear conscience.

"It's Max Bauer," I insinuated, "Max Bauer."

I must have got it across, for as Bauer edged closer and as I seized the shard, the old man stared at that sensual, dark face with an expression of recognition. There must have come to him then some inkling of the situation.

"Yes," he whispered, "let him have it."

He took the fragment from me, held it up tenderly for a moment in his two frail, fine old hands, and then placed it in the thick hands of Max Bauer. Bauer closed upon it greedily.

"Murdered him!" moaned Twining.

"Murdered me nothing," chuckled Bauer, who could now, with the vase in his grasp, afford to be generous. " 'S all right, old man; we're quits."

But Twining was fumbling for a piece of paper.

"This!" he breathed. "Tell them where—painting before sculpture—"

"But great Caesar, they've known all this for forty years!" exploded Bauer, scanning the written statement. "Why, they found fragments of another Euphronios in that same Persian dirt heap; some one else proved that very thing, and the Lord knows how many other things. Just fragments though, y'understand—not a perfect one like this." Bauer let

the paper flutter from his hands; I quietly picked up Twining's written confession and later dropped it into the stove. The old man relapsed into his former state of wandering misery, with apparently no recollection of the episode.

Bauer left soon after that.

"A good day for me, and I owe it all to you, Van Nuys—My thanks," he made genial acknowledgment from the doorway.

I choked on my disgust of him. So Max Bauer, whom only circumstances outside of himself had saved from actual murder, went up to the city, successful and carefree, to add to his many treasures old "Tinker" Twining's one treasure.

I stayed with the old scholar, whose every instinct would have held him from the murder he had planned, and watched him wear himself out, suffering to the last breath for his one mental sin.

That is why I hope, at the final reckoning, God will take some account of the sensitiveness of the souls he weighs, and will fix his penalties accordingly.

A Weird Prophetic Dream and Its Gruesome Fulfillment

ALMOST EVERY person has experienced at least one grotesque or horrible dream during a lifetime. Few there are, however, who are afterward able to link their dreams with subsequent happenings, as was the case with Dr. Walter F. Prince, Principal Research Officer of the American Society for Psychical Research, and editor of its official journal.

Four remarkable prophetic dreams by Dr. Prince are recorded in a recent issue of the "Journal," together with the testimonials of reputable people to whom the dreams were related before there was any indication that their fulfillment would be realized. This precaution is taken, as a general rule, by those who are accustomed to search out the truths of psychic phenomena in the interests of the society, as that body would not otherwise accept them as having evidential value, regardless of their sources.

Through the courtesy of the editors of the "Journal" we are permitted to reprint Dr. Prince's narrative of his striking fourth dream, and the newspaper article which describes its fulfillment. In reading the description of the dream, please note the recurrence of the word "hand," and remember, when you read the second article, that subjective impressions are often symbolical.

The dream follows:

"New York, Nov. 30, 1917.

"DOCUMENT ONE.

"ON THE night following Nov. 27, I dreamed that I had in my hands a small paper with an order printed in red ink, for the execution of the bearer, a woman. I did not seem to have any distinct notion of the reason for her condemnation, but it seemed that I inferred that it was for a political offense, and some thought of the French Revolution seems faintly connected with it; though it may be that I was only reminded of the execution of such as Madame Roland. The woman appeared to have voluntarily brought the order, and she expressed herself as willing to die, if I would only hold her HAND.

"I remember her looks quite well; she was slender, of the willowy type, had blonde hair, small girlish features, and was rather pretty. She sat down to die without any appearance of reluctance, seeming fully calm and resigned. It was not clear where we were, but she seemed to me to be in a chair. I should have thought her about 35.

"Then the light went out and it was dark. I could not tell how she was put to death, but soon I felt her HAND grip mine (my HAND,) and knew that the deed was being done. Then I felt one HAND (of mine) on the hair of the head, which was loose and severed from the body, and felt the moisture of blood. Then the fingers of my other HAND were caught in her teeth, and the mouth opened and shut several times as the teeth refastened on my HAND, and I was filled with the horror of the thought of a severed but living head. Here the dream faded out....."

FOLLOWING the dream are the depositions of witnesses to whom the dream was related before the incident described in the newspaper article. As we have not the space to reprint them, interested parties are referred to the issue of the "Journal" mentioned above.

On the early afternoon of Nov. 29, as Dr. Prince and his wife were returning to their home in Flushing, L. I., they noticed the following article in "The Evening Telegram:"

"HEAD SEVERED BY TRAIN AS WOMAN ENDS HER LIFE

"Deliberately placing her head in front of the wheels of a train that had stopped at the Long Island Railroad Station at Hollis, L. I., so that the wheels would pass over her when it started, a woman identified by letters in her handbag as Mrs. Sarah A. HAND, thirty years old, of ——— West ——— St., ended her life early today. In the handbag, beside the letters, was found a letter, rambling in its contents, that predicted the existence of life in her body after death AND THAT HER HEAD WOULD STILL CONTINUE TO LIVE AFTER IT HAD BEEN SEVERED FROM HER BODY.

"The husband of the woman, ——— HAND, was notified at the ——— Street address, and he went to Hollis in a taxicab. He said his wife had been missing from home since NOVEMBER 27. Since the death of her little girl, several months ago, he asserted, Mrs. HAND had acted strangely."

Savages Burn Man Alive To Appease "Goddess"

HUMAN SACRIFICE is still practiced among certain tribes in Africa. Recently six members of a tribe in Southern Rhodesia were sentenced to death for burning a young man alive in an effort to appease the "rain goddess," a young and beautiful girl. The young man whose life was sacrificed was the son of the tribal chief, and he was charged with having assaulted the "goddess." This, the natives believed, accounted for the severe drought that afflicted Rhodesia, and it was decreed that the chief's son should perish at the stake. The natives joined in a wild celebration when, soon after the young man's body was burnt to a crisp, rain began to fall.

A Sardonic Novel of Witchcraft
Complete In This Issue

THE STRANGE CASE OF JACOB ARUM

By JOHN HARRIS BURLAND

IT WAS SAID—openly enough—in the village that there was something wrong about Jacob Arum; but I always put that down to the natural impulse of simple country folk to regard any eccentric person with suspicion. I should be sorry to tell you all the crimes that were from time to time laid to the account of this man who had, for no apparent reason whatever, come to live among us.

Some said that he was wanted by the police for fraud or burglary or even murder. There were others—and those a little out of date—who averred that he had been a pirate, and that the gold and jewels he had taken from dead men on the high seas were kept in great iron-bound boxes in his cellar.

Then there was one old woman who was certain that he had made a compact with the devil, that he would never die, and that he would live on in agony until the end of the world.

"And mebbe," she said, "that little ugly black fellow be the devil himself."

The "little ugly black fellow" was Jacob Arum's only servant. His name was Brike, and when he went into the village to purchase anything for his master, the boys hid themselves behind walls and hooted at him.

"You be the devil!" they would shriek. "Take care as the parson don't see you."

But Brike, a hump-backed, limping little man, with long, powerful arms and

thick legs, took no notice of them whatever. He was not black but a grayish yellow—a half-breed of the negroid type. And he spoke English perfectly.

Well, that will give you some idea of how Jacob Arum stood in the estimation of the ignorant and uneducated portion of Harthaven's five hundred inhabitants. The rector, of course, looked at Jacob Arum from an entirely different point of view. He had never been admitted into the house, and Arum, by repute a wealthy man, had not only never entered the church, but had definitely refused to subscribe sixpence to any parochial fund.

"The man is a heathen," the rector said to me, "and that's all I care about. It is very sad."

The doctor, a rather cynical young fellow, was inclined to regard Arum as a joke.

"He'll never send for a clergyman," he once said, when we were discussing Arum; "but one of these days he'll have to send for me."

Then there was an old professor who was writing a gigantic work—at least, one presumed it was gigantic, because it was known that he had already spent twenty years of his life over it—on the witchcraft of all countries and ages. He was a funny little old fellow, quite bald, and with a set of false teeth that reminded one of the chorus girls in denti-frice advertisements.

"My dear boy," he said to me in his squeaky voice, "Arum's under a spell, and that black servant has some hand in it."

I can pass over the opinion of three maiden ladies who lived at Laburnum Villa, and "never, *never* passed by the gates of that awful house," lest they should see something that ought not to be seen. They looked upon Jacob Arum as "improper," and they "feared the worst." There was much shaking of gray heads, and murmuring of half-finished sentences, but nothing definite.

"He's spoilt the village," Miss Mary said. "We were *so* happy before he came, like a little colony of friends."

To tell you the honest truth; I rather envied Jacob Arum his notoriety. I had lived in the village most of my life, and my forefathers had lived there for three hundred years. A good deal of the land, and most of the cottages belonged to me. I had fought in the war, and had been wounded. My life had merely been that of any simple country gentleman. But I am sure I had never caused any excitement in Harthaven. No one talked about me. I was just taken as a matter of course. There had been a Hart of Harthaven for so many years, that I was of no more interest than the house in which I lived, of the creek that ran through the level marshland to the sea.

I had not even the satisfaction of being Arum's landlord. He had bought the house and the three acres of ground that surrounded it from the executors of an old woman who had died after being seventy-five years in the village.

I knew the house well enough, for the old woman had been a friend of my grandmother's. I had even bid for it at the auction, but, unwilling to give a fancy price, I had allowed it to be knocked down to the queer, hump-backed little fellow who had given his name as Brike. Even at that early stage in the proceedings, Jacob Arum had kept himself in the background. And the auctioneer afterward told me that the whole of the purchase money had been paid in gold and silver.

No one ever saw Arum move into his house. Brike arranged everything, and we saw a good deal of Brike while the place was being decorated; and, later on, when van-loads of valuable furniture stood outside the newly-painted gate in the old brick wall. But no one in the village could name the day, much less the hour, of Jacob Arum's arrival.

And, once inside the house, he never left it. Brike explained that his master was an invalid, but Brike was not inclined to be talkative, and answered very few of the questions that were put to him.

For my part, I pictured Arum as a man who wished to be talked about and regarded as a man of mystery. No one had even seen him, and everything that he purchased was paid for in cash. We had not even set eyes on his signature.

Well, Jacob Arum purchased the property in January, 1919, and it was not until the October of that year that I met the man for the first time.

I well remember that night. For three weeks the weather had been very wet and windy, and then there was a sharp frost, and the wind dropped, and the marshland was hidden in a white mist that crept in upon us from the sea.

Professor Turton and young Saltby were dining with me, and we were discussing Jacob Arum over our glasses of port, when my footman entered the room, and said that "Mr. Brike" wished to see me.

"Hallo!" said Saltby. "What about that for telepathy?" And the professor laughed so heartily that he nearly choked himself with a small piece of walnut.

"Where is the fellow?" I asked the servant, when we had restored the professor to normal state.

"He's round at the back, sir," the man replied. "Where would you like to see him?"

"In the library," I replied; and then, turning to the others, I asked them to excuse me, and left the room.

The library was a long, narrow room at the back of the house. The walls were covered with books, rarely touched except by the servant whose duty it was to dust them; for I am no greater reader, such as my father was.

There was a big fire of logs burning in the open grate, but the heat of it was not sufficient to dispel the fog that had crept in through the shuttered windows. I took up my position with my back to the fire and waited for my strange visitor. I could not imagine any reason that could possibly account for this unexpected visit.

I had often seen Brike in the village, but I must confess that when he was shown into the library, and the door closed behind him, and he stood there with his hat in his hand and a thick black overcoat that almost touched the ground, I received a new impression of the man. That end of the room was badly lighted, and the atmosphere was far from clear; so, of course, a good deal of Brike's appearance was left to the imagination.

Still, I fancy that that could hardly account for the fact that he seemed to me to be someone of much greater importance than the hunchbacked servant of a rather eccentric master. His dark face and body blended with the shadows, and the way in which he stood there, without speaking or coming forward directly the door had closed behind him, may have contributed to my impression of a very strong and distinctive personality. It was almost as though he had expected me to cross the room to greet him.

Of course, as you may well imagine, I did not move an inch; and, after a few minutes of silence, I said sharply:

"Well, what is it? What do you want?"

He came forward, then, into the light, and he was no more than the quiet and deferential servant, bearing some message from his master. His face was ugly and deeply lined.

"Mr. Arum—sir," he said, in a rather soft, pleasant voice, "he asked me to come and see you. Mr. Arum would be honored and obliged if you could spare him a few minutes."

"Where is he? Not outside, surely?"

"No, sir; he is at home and not very well. I think he wants to talk to you on some matters of importance."

I did not want to go, and I fell back on the true British line of defense:

"I do not know Mr. Arum," I said stiffly. "I called on him, and he has never returned my call. I am sorry he is ill, but his private affairs do not concern me."

The man looked at me as though I were some curious specimen of humanity, and so, doubtless, I should have seemed to the simple mind of a savage.

"He is in trouble, sir," Brike continued, "and there is no one in this place that he would care to speak to about it except you, sir."

"I am honored," I said coldly, but I felt that I was making a ridiculous ass of myself. "I have two friends to dinner. One of them is Dr. Saltby. If Mr. Arum is ill, perhaps Dr. Saltby—"

"It is *you*, sir, that my master wants," he interrupted. "Of all those who live in this village, you are the only one he feels that he can trust."

Flattery of this sort did not appeal to me. I had a natural curiosity to see this mysterious Mr. Arum, but I could not forget the intolerable rudeness of the fellow, and most certainly I did not like the look of his servant. Even as Brike stood there before me, pleading quietly and respectfully, it seemed to me that he was only wearing a mask of humility, and that all the time he was regarding me rather as an enemy than a friend.

"You cannot tell me the nature of your master's business?" I queried, after a pause.

"No, sir; I am only his servant."

There was something so Oriental about this reply that I almost expected to see the man bow low with outstretched arms. But he stood there as stolidly as any Englishman.

"And, I suppose," I continued, "you cannot tell me why your master has chosen me for his confidence?"

"He had heard well of you, sir."

"From you, eh?" I laughed.

"I only repeat what I hear from others, sir."

"That I am a simple-minded fellow," I said to myself; and I began to understand why Jacob Arum had sent for me. Either of my two guests would have been a bit too sharp for him. The young doctor was a remarkably clever fellow, and the professor had a world-wide reputation. They were both intellectual men. I was merely a "turnip," to use a word commonly employed in reference to country gentlemen. This idea put me on my mettle. It did not occur to me that I might be entirely mistaken. I had got the idea into my head, and it stayed there.

"I will come with you," I said. "I am a justice of the peace, and I suppose that is really why Mr. Arum wants to see me. If you will wait in here for a few minutes, I will take you back in the car."

The man bowed, but seemed in no way surprised that I should have asked a servant to wait in my library, instead of sending him back to the servants' quarters. I returned to the dining-room and told my guests that I was going round to see Jacob Arum.

"Well, that's a bit of luck for you," said Saltby. "Can't I come?"

"I'm afraid not," I replied. "I don't know what the fellow wants; it's all very mysterious. Anyhow, you'd better stay here. I'll be back in less than an hour. Make yourselves at home; perhaps I'll have a story to tell you when I return."

Saltby laughed, but Turton followed me out of the room into the hall.

"Keep your eyes open," he whispered, in that thin, high-pitched voice of his. "Something queer about that fellow, Brike. Very interesting to me; wish I could come with you. Keep your eyes open. Crusty old man, Arum will seem to you, but look for something else under the surface. The devil is about, even in these days!"

"All right, old chap!" I laughed. "I'll find him for you if he's in that house!"

CHAPTER TWO

MY HOUSE, Harthaven Hall, is about half a mile from the village—that being the exact distance between my front door and the inner entrance to the park.

Though the fog was very thick, Walters, my chauffeur, drove us along at a rattling pace. Naturally enough, he knew every inch of the road, and even if the wheels ran off it, there was only level grass on either side. The moon showed like a white globe of frosted glass, in which the lamp burned dimly. Our powerful headlights made a confusing glow of vapor ahead, and were worse than useless; but we reached the lodge gates in one minute, and two minutes later we drew up outside the small door in the high red brick wall of Brent Lodge. Brike alighted, and opened the door with a key. Then he stood to one side so that I could pass him. I leant over the seat and told Walter to wait for me.

"But don't wait too long," I added. "If I'm not back here in an hour, get over that wall and ring the front door bell; and if no one answers the bell, come and look for me. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," he replied, for all the world as though such instructions were a commonplace order.

I passed through the door, and it closed behind me. Brike took an electric torch from his pocket, and showed me the path. It was paved, and on the other side of it the grass was thick and tall. I caught an occasional glimpse of neglected flower beds, and bushes that sadly needed pruning. Certainly Jacob Arum took no pride in his garden.

As I have told you, I knew the house well enough in the days when old Miss Unwin lived in it. It had been built in the reign of George the Third, and though it was only of moderate size, it had the tall windows and lofty rooms of that period.

The old lady's furniture—heavy, ugly stuff made about the time of the Great Exhibition—had been sadly out of keeping with the fine proportion of the walls and the ceilings, decorated, so it was said, by the great Robert Adam himself.

But now, when Brike had unlocked the front door and I had entered the hall, I saw that everything had most wonderfully changed. There was a Persian carpet on the floor, and rare Chippendale chairs against the walls, and one of the most beautiful Sheraton tables I have ever seen.

He showed me into the drawing-room, and left me there while he went upstairs to tell Mr. Arum of my arrival. The room was sparsely and severely furnished, but every piece of furniture in it was a treasure. Mr. Arum was evidently a man of taste. But it was equally clear that his room was hardly ever used. There was no fire in the grate, and not even the materials for a fire. There was not a paper or book, or any sign of recent occupation. And the dust lay thick over everything.

I remembered what it had been like in the old days—the woolly mats and the waxen flowers on the big hideous center table with its one great leg; the vast sofas and chairs, the appalling pictures! But, for all that, it had been homelike, and a fire had roared there at all hours of the day, and old Miss Unwin had played patience on an ugly little table, or had executed monstrosities in Berlin wool upon a piece of framed canvas.

In those days there had been the cheerful glow of several very inartistic oil lamps. Now there was a splendid eighteenth century crystal chandelier hanging from the ceiling, and two wax candles burnt mournfully in it like candles in the room of the dead.

"It's jolly cold," I said to myself, and then I heard a woman's voice in the hall

outside. It was raised in anger, but I could not distinguish the words.

The next moment the door burst open, and a girl closed it behind her and locked it. For a moment she stood there, breathing hard. Then she came forward and said:

"You must think we're all mad in this house."

"Oh, no," I laughed—"not *all* of you."

She was evidently frightened or angry, but she was the sort of girl that made a man feel pleased with himself. She was very young and slim, and beautiful, with her golden brown hair and gray eyes and perfectly poised head. It would have been a pleasure to protect her from anyone who had frightened her, to save her from any danger, to make her smiling and happy. And it would have been equally pleasant to have just sat and looked at her, laughing, as I was sure she generally laughed, and glad to be alive.

"One does not usually enter a room in this way," she explained, "but I wanted to talk to you, and Brike—well, Brike wanted to take you away upstairs at once. He's outside—now—listening. You are Mr. Hart, aren't you?"

"Yes—and you?"

She came forward; and she did not speak until she was close to me.

"I only came here this afternoon," she said, "and my arrival was in keeping with everything else in this queer house. I left the train at the junction, and Brike rowed me down the creek with my little box. And I landed at the bottom of the garden. I don't think anyone in the village knows I'm here."

"*I* did not," I replied. "And you are—"

"Audrey Pinson; I'm Mr. Arum's niece, his only relative. My mother was his sister. She died twenty years ago—well, it doesn't matter about all that, Mr. Hart. It's that horrible man—"

"You mean Brike?" I queried.

"Yes. He didn't want me to come in here just now. But I heard the car stop outside the garden door, and I saw you both come up the path. And I made up my mind that I *would* see you."

"Splendid idea of yours," I said with a smile.

She flushed and an angry sparkle came into her eyes. One could just see it by the light of the two candles.

"Oh, if you're going to treat me as a silly child," she said; and then, after a pause, she added, "I'm sorry. I have no right to talk to you like that. But I don't think you understand how serious it all is. My uncle is very ill, and he will not see a doctor. I don't know why he sent for you, but I implore you to use your influence with him, and get him to have a doctor. I believe that horrible man Brike is keeping everyone away from him."

I interrupted her to point out that if Brike had wished to do that, Brike need not have fetched me.

"And remember," I continued, "that most likely Brike sent the telegram or posted the letter that brought you here."

"Well, in any case," she continued, "Brike did not wish me to talk to you. I have seen my uncle for a few minutes, and it seemed to me that he thinks all the world of Brike. And there *is* something wrong. I'm sure of that."

I asked her why she imagined anything of the sort, and she merely answered:

"The man isn't a servant at all. He's the master."

There was a gentle knock upon the door.

"He is going to take you upstairs," she whispered, "but when you are in the room, you must get rid of him. I want you to talk to my uncle *alone*. You can open the door."

I crossed the long, dimly-lighted room, and, turning the key in the lock, swung back the door.

"I beg your pardon, sir," Brike said humbly, "but my master particularly wants to see you at once. I have been upstairs with him, and you must please to come and see him at once."

He held a lighted candle in his hand. He had changed his heavy boots for a pair of felt slippers. He had removed his overcoat, and his crinkled black hair was neatly oiled and brushed. In spite of his coloring and deformity, he seemed to be a very superior servant. And he could not have been outside the door all the time.

"I hope I have not offended Miss Pinson, sir," he said, when he had closed the door. "The fact is, sir, that the master did not wish her to see you or know anything about your visit. Sometimes he gets queer ideas like that into his head."

I made no reply; I followed the man up the broad shallow stairs, and when he paused on the spacious landing, I walked past him and examined a very beautiful picture, which was hanging on the white panelled walls. It was the portrait of a young and handsome woman in the costume of the eighteenth century, and looked to me very like a Romney. I was not really very interested in the picture just then, but I though it as well to show Brike that my thoughts were not entirely occupied wih his affairs.

"The master's great-grandmother, sir," he said, coming to my side, and he held up the candle so that I could get a better view of the portrait.

And then, after a pause: "Will you please step this way, sir."

CHAPTER THREE

I FOLLOWED Brike to the other side of the landing, and he knocked on a door. I heard a voice call out:

"Come in—come in."

Brike entered the room, turned and beckoned to me. I followed and found myself, not in a bedroom, as I had expected, but in a very comfortably furnished sitting-room.

The cold severity of the eighteenth century had been subordinated to more modern ideas of comfort. There were fine pictures on the walls, two magnificent pieces of lacquer—one a chest and the other a cabinet, a Heppelwhite bookcase, several exquisite Chippendale chairs. But there were also big Chesterfields and armchairs, and novels littered about on little tables, and pipes and tobacco jars, and all the little odds and ends that a man likes to gather round him in his "den."

Of course, I did not take everything in at a glance, and I am recounting what I saw during my interview. Indeed, directly I entered the room, I saw only Mr. Arum sitting by the fire, with a rug drawn up over his knees. He was a good-looking man of about sixty with a pale clean-shaven face, and restless gray eyes. There was not much light in the room, and it was all behind him, where six candles burnt in six silver candlesticks. Yet I could see his face clearly enough in the firelight.

"Thank you so much for coming," he said in a slow, quiet voice, "I was rather afraid you would not come. You can go, Brike. I'll ring when I want you."

Brike left the room without a word, and I smiled as I thought of what the girl had said to me. There was nothing mysterious about this part of the business, at any rate. I had expected a certain unwillingness on the part of Brike to leave his master alone with me. I had even invented a plan whereby I could get rid of Brike. But here was Brike perfectly willing to go, and Jacob Arum just an ordinary gentleman, ill, no doubt, or he would not have kept that rug over his knees, but receiving me courteously, and behaving just as any other man would have behaved under the circumstances.

"If I can be of any service to you," I said, "I shall be glad."

Arum laughed.

"Take a cigar," he said, "and you will find whisky and soda on that table behind me. You will excuse me sitting

here like a log, but I'm ill—yes, I'm very ill, Mr. Hart. Well, that doesn't matter. Help yourself to a cigar and something to drink."

I did as he wished, and when I had seated myself in the chair on the other side of the fireplace, I said:

"I'm afraid I can't stop very long. Two fellows are dining with me. They are waiting for me to return."

"That makes it all the more kind of you to come," said Arum. "Well, I shan't keep you long."

He thrust his left hand into one of the inner pockets of his coat, drew out a folded document and handed it to me.

"That is my will," he said, " and I want you to keep it for me. I have never cared for banks or lawyers, and I daresay people have told you that I never write a check."

"You surely don't keep all your money in your house," I exclaimed.

It was an unpardonable remark, but I could not help making it.

"I beg your pardon," I continued, "I had no right to say anything of the sort. It is no business of mine."

"Yes, it is your business, Mr. Hart. I have appointed you the sole executor of my will, and have left you five hundred pounds for your trouble."

This was an astonishing piece of information.

"Oh, really, Mr. Arum!" I said.

"If you can't accept the job," Arum continued, "I shall put my niece in your place. She inherits practically everything. But she is rather a silly child. I'd like to have a man's help in this matter."

I hesitated for a few moments and then I said:

"All right, Mr. Arum. It's really uncommonly good of you."

"Well, that's settled," he said cheerfully. "Now I want you to read the will."

I opened out the thick sheet of paper, and began to read the contents. There was a legacy of a thousand pounds to "my old and faithful servant, William Brike," and there was a further legacy to "John Hart of Harthaven Hall" in consideration of his undertaking the duties of executor. Everything else was left to Audrey Pinson.

And then I came to the signature, and it was that which startled me. It was hardly legible—an untidy scrawl that would have disgraced a child of ten. I looked up at Jacob Arum, and he laughed.

"Not much of a fist, eh?" he said. "I never could learn to write with my left hand." Then he moved his right arm, covered halfway to the elbow with the rug, and showed me an iron hook—one of those old-fashioned things that I imagined had long ago been cast into the dustheap.

"That's one of my troubles," he said, "and the other is my heart."

"Bad accident," he said. "Years ago. One doesn't care to go about among people and have them ask whether one was wounded in France or Mesopotamia. Besides, I hate people. I like my own society—my books, my furniture, my pictures. All that will be sold when I die. That's all I've got except a little cash to go on with—last my time, I expect. The contents of this house are worth forty thousand pounds."

He leant his head back and closed his eyes, as though he had exhausted himself by so much talking.

"You'd better have a drink," I said. "Shall I mix one for you?"

"Thanks," he said faintly. "I believe it would brighten me up a bit."

I gave him a strong brandy-and-soda, and told him that he ought to see a doctor.

"I don't know if a doctor can do you any good, Mr. Arum," I said; "but if you have a bad heart you certainly ought to see one."

He shook his head.

"They're all rogues," he replied. "I don't believe in them at all. My faith in God won't let me believe in them. How can they interfere with God's will?"

I had heard this talk before, from the "Peculiar People" who lived in a village not more than ten miles from Harthaven.

"What about your hand?" I queried. "I suppose you ought really to have bled to death."

"Ah, then—I did not know the truth," he said simply. "I can see now that I was meant to die. Please don't argue with me. It is a matter of faith with me. But I am glad to be able to tell you what I believe. I don't want my faithful Brike to be blamed for my death."

I saw that there was nothing to be gained by argument. I suggested that he should give me an inventory of the things in the house.

"You see," I explained, "if the contents of this house represent your fortune, I think I ought to know just what there is in the place."

It seemed that I had only anticipated his own request. I followed his instructions and found a thick quarto volume, bound in green morocco, in one of the book-cases.

"That is a full catalogue," he said, "and there are photographs of the most valuable pieces. If you care for such things, you will find it of considerable interest. Now, Mr. Hart, if there is anything you wish to ask me—well, there is no time like the present. We may not meet again."

"Oh, come, come," I said cheerfully. "You're not so bad as all that."

"I do not know when my time will come," he replied; "it may be soon or late. But in any case it is doubtful if I shall see you again."

I offered to call and look him up any time he chose to send for me, but he shook his head.

"That is most kind of you," he replied; "but habits of long standing are not easily broken. I am very grateful to you for having come to my assistance."

I opened out the will, which I still held in my hand, and looked at the names of the witnesses.

"Shall I have any difficulty in finding these people?" I asked.

He assured me that there would be no difficulty. They were both young people, and, so far as he knew, they were both alive.

I folded up the document and placed it in my pocket. Mr. Arum touched the button of a small electric bell. Then he held out his left hand to me.

"Again I thank you," he said gently.

"It is I who have to thank *you*," I answered with a smile, "for your very handsome legacy. I only hope that it will not come my way for many years."

"Ah, you will have to work for it, Mr. Hart. There is so much to be arranged. Good-night and good-by."

The door opened and Brike came softly into the room. He came to his master's side and said:

"Ah, you have been tiring yourself, sir. You ought not to have let this gentleman stay here for so long."

"We have said all we wished to say," Arum answered. "Please accompany Mr. Hart to the car."

I followed Brike out on to the landing and down the stairs. The door of the drawing-room was open, and I could see Audrey Pinson standing by a table with a letter in her hand. She was trying to read it by the feeble light of the candles in the chandelier, but, as I paused a moment gazing at her—admiring the exquisite picture of that slim figure against the background of an old mirror—she looked up at me.

"I have a word to say to Miss Pinson," I exclaimed abruptly. "Perhaps you will kindly go on and tell my chauffeur to start up the car. It takes some little warming on a cold night."

The fellow began to protest, but I cut him short with a curt, "Kindly mind

your own business," and he walked slowly to the hall door.

I waited until he had left the house, and then I entered the drawing-room.

"I've seen your uncle," I said, "and I don't think he's nearly so ill as he imagines. And Brike made no attempt to remain in the room. I think you're wrong about Brike. How long are you going to stay here?"

"I don't know," she replied. "As long as my uncle wishes, I suppose. I did not wish to come, but my aunt insisted. She is my father's sister, and I live with her. You see, we are very poor, and uncle said something about leaving me all his property."

"Yes, yes, but your aunt ought to have come with you. I've heard there are no women servants in the house—no servants at all but this fellow Brike. And he seems inclined to dislike you. Well, what I really wished to say, Miss Pinson, was that I am always at your service, if you want me. Anyone in the village will bring a message to me."

"It is very, very kind of you," she said, with a smile, "but I can look after myself. It's my uncle I'm worried about. You must send in a doctor."

"Your uncle won't see him. He's one of the 'Peculiar People'—a little sect that is pretty strong about here. It's a matter of religion with him. And I really don't think his life is in any danger. Good-night, Miss Pinson."

We shook hands, and then I said:

"Look here, I don't suppose you'll want my help, but that's no reason why we should not meet again? You'll find it very dull here, but you'll go for walks, I expect, and—and, well, I expect I shall meet you in the village somewhere. I am often about in the morning."

She smiled, and I was content to carry away the memory of that smile with me, without any further words. I left the house, and found Brike talking with the chauffeur. There had evidently been no attempt on his part to overhear our conversation.

During the short drive back to the house, I thought a good deal of Audrey Pinson and very little of Jacob Arum. And I felt that I had made rather an absurd exhibition of myself—that I must have appeared to her as rather a stammering, awkward fellow; and I had tried to make a kind of appointment with her.

But I consoled myself with the thought that it was my duty to see her again very soon, and find out just what was going on at Brent Lodge. In spite of all the evidence in Brike's favor, I mistrusted the man.

I FOUND the Professor and the young doctor playing billiards when I returned to the house, but they put their cues against the wall when I entered the room.

I told them of my "adventure"—that is Saltby's word, not mine—and answered such questions as they cared to ask me. Saltby seemed to be more interested in Audrey Pinson than anything else. He was indignant that any young girl should be forced to stay in a place like that in order to get money from a dying man.

"You may depend upon it," he said, "that her aunt is a pretty rotten sort of woman."

Turton, on the other hand, was very interested in Brike. He was even annoyed that I had not asked him into the library to have a talk with Brike.

"Of course, I have seen him in the village," he said, "but only twice. That's a very remarkable man, Hart, and perhaps a very dangerous man."

Neither of them seemed to take much interest in Jacob Arum, and I think they regarded him as a mere crank—a fellow soured by physical defects, and unwilling to get out of a groove of self-pity and melancholy.

"And, of course," said Saltby, "if he is one of the 'Peculiar People,' he'll just die without calling me in, and very likely Brike and the girl will be punished for his folly."

My guests did not leave me until nearly midnight. And I must confess that I was not sorry to be alone. I sat by the fire in the library—a fire that had sunk to a mere glow of red embers. My strange impression of William Brike as he had entered that room came back to me.

I wondered if there was anything in Turton's rather far-fetched idea that this misshapen fellow was not quite as other men—that he had powers not given to ordinary human beings.

Well, of course, Turton's head was full of that kind of thing. He had marked down the wife of an old man who worked on my estate, and had labeled her as a witch. And she had confessed to a mild kind of witchcraft—the making of love-potions.

But Brike was a very different proposition. If Brike had any superhuman powers, I felt sure that they would be employed solely in the working of evil.

CHAPTER FOUR

A WEEK passed before I met Audrey Pinson in the village, and she told me that she was glad we had met, and that if she hadn't just happened to come across me, she had intended to come up to my house.

Her face was pale, and I could see that she was thoroughly upset.

"I have only seen my uncle once again," she said, "and then only for a few minutes. He was very strange in his manner. He—I don't think he's quite right in his head, Mr. Hart."

"He was all right when I saw him," I replied.

"Well, I am going home tomorrow," she said. "I can't stand the place any longer. My uncle has got it into his head that he is dying, but that God will not allow him to die. And that horrible Brike talks in the same fashion. Yesterday he made me pray with him—fall on my knees and pray that some miracle might be performed. I—I felt it was all so blasphemous. There are no miracles in these days, and if my uncle is really so ill he ought to have a doctor."

I suggested that perhaps Brike was going to pose as a worker of miracles, and was preparing the stage for an exhibition of his powers.

"I've known a charlatan of a doctor to do something of the same sort," I continued. "He told his patient that he had consumption, but that it might be possible to effect a cure. Well, of course, the wonderful cure was effected, because the patient never had anything the matter with him. Perhaps Brike is at some game like that."

Audrey Pinson laughed, and then her face grew very grave.

"Brike seems in earnest," she said. "I can only think that he is mad, and that my uncle is mad. Oh, there is Brike now!"

I looked down the long, wide street, which runs along the edge of the creek, and saw Arum's servant with a big basket on his arm. And, at that same moment, Professor Turton came out of the cottage close by, and raised his hat.

"That's a very old friend of mine," I said to Miss Pinson. "We'll go and look him up. Then we shall escape from Brike."

And the professor, as though he had heard what I was saying, came quickly toward me. I introduced him to Miss Pinson, and he said:

"I believe it's going to rain hard in a minute. You'd better take shelter."

And when we were inside his cottage, he laughed.

"Shelter from the enemy, eh?" he chuckled.

Audrey Pinson frowned and glanced at me with reproach in her eyes, as though she fancied that I had been gossiping about her affairs.

"Professor Turton is an old friend of mine," I explained. "He may be able to help us—suggest some explanation. I wonder if you'd mind telling him what you have just told me?"

"One moment," said Turton. "Just think it over while I have a good look at our friend, Brike."

He left the room and trotted out of the house. Through the window I saw the two men meet a few yards to the left of the garden gate. They conversed for quite five minutes. Brike was evidently in a very humble mood, for he frequently touched his cap.

"I just told him that you were in here, Miss Pinson," said the professor, when he came hurrying in out of the rain, "in case he wanted to find you. A curious type, Miss Pinson. I should think he was more than half a negro; childishly superstitious—at least, he would seem so to you. Now, if you would just tell me—"

Audrey Pinson repeated her story, but apparently with some reluctance. The professor smiled and rubbed his hands together.

"That's the idea," he said. "He's going to perform a miracle—bring the dead to life."

"My dear Turton!" I exclaimed.

"I've paid special attention to that kind of thing," the professor said. "In fact, I have quite a lot of notes on the subject. But the evidence is not very reliable—all native evidence, mind you. What happens, or is supposed to happen, is this: A man dies and is brought to life again by the witch-doctor. Of course, if there is any truth in the evidence—and I really believe there is—the witch-doctor has some method of producing the appearance of death—of stopping the beating of the heart and the breathing—for quite a long while. Then he pronounces his incantations, and the dead man comes to life again."

I laughed and suggested that this semblance of death would hardly deceive an English doctor. It might be good enough for a pack of ignorant niggers, but with young Saltby, for instance—

"Still, Brike is going to have a try," said Turton.

"But, my dear Turton," I exclaimed, "whatever has put such a ridiculous idea into your head?"

"Because Brike asked me where he could find a black fowl, and a black bird is one of the articles required in this ceremony."

Audrey Pinson began to laugh—rather hysterically, so it seemed to me. I do not think she was scared at all by this talk about witchcraft and ju-ju, but she was relieved to find that Brike was up to nothing worse.

I cut into her laughter with another question:

"Why," I asked Turton, "should Brike want to perform these ridiculous rites?"

The professor did not answer immediately, and I glanced at Audrey Pinson, as much as to say: "I've got him there."

But the professor was one of those men that are very difficult to drive into a corner.

"I should say," he replied, after a pause, "that Brike is not an impostor, like the witch-doctors. Brike firmly believes that he can bring the dead to life. He has seen this trick performed, and he does not know that it is merely a trick. He knows what has to be done—what he has possibly seen done on several occasions among his own people. He intends to wait until Mr. Arum is really dead, and then he hopes to bring him to life again."

"Would this be of any advantage to Brike?" I asked.

"Brike fancies that it would," Turton replied, "because Brike really believes that he can bring Arum back to life. Brike would naturally expect Arum's gratitude to take some concrete form—the gift of a large sum of money, or perhaps his master's entire fortune when Arum dies again."

I thought it better to say nothing of Arum's will. I could not betray the trust that had been placed in me, just to make a point in an idle argument.

"My dear Turton," I said, after a pause, "you forget that Arum refuses to let even a doctor save him from death. Is it likely that he would be pleased with this unholy interference with the course of Nature?"

"Perhaps that has not occurred to Brike."

"Oh, the man's not a fool!" I said sharply. "And I think that disposes of your theory."

But one could not dispose of Turton so easily as that.

"No doubt Brike will keep his rites and incantations to himself," he replied. "He will make it appear—and he will have witnesses to prove his assertion—that he effected this miracle by prayer."

I smiled.

"You are an expert swordsman, Turton," I said, "but the whole idea is too fantastic. You are really building up this wonderful structure on nothing more than the fact that Brike is of negro descent, and that he has asked you where he could purchase a black fowl. You are a very learned man, Turton, and have been engaged on research all your life, especially in this sort of thing. To gentry like you a very small detail will indicate a promising line of inquiry."

Turton nodded.

"There's no other way of getting at the truth," he said.

"Oh, yes, there is!" I laughed.

And then Audrey Pinson, who had been standing at the window, and apparently taking no interest whatever in our discussion, suddenly exclaimed:

"Here's Brike, back again!"

The professor remained by the fireplace, but I crossed the room to the girl's side. It was still raining, and Brike passed, his head bent down and the basket on his arm. A gust of wind blew aside a corner of the cloth that covered the basket, and the head and neck of a black fowl popped out and disappeared again.

"I expect," I said to Miss Pinson, with a laugh, "that you will have chicken for dinner tonight."

"He's got them, eh?" said Turton.

"One, at any rate," I replied.

Turton chuckled and rubbed his hands together.

"If only I could get into that house," he said. "Very remarkable, a civilized negro, in these days—and in England. Miss Pinson, I implore you to stay at Brent Lodge a little longer. If you go—well, you're the only link between that place and the outside world."

Before Miss Pinson could reply, I said:

"It's not a fit place for her, alone with that black devil! Great Scott, Turton, have you no imagination?"

"I intend to stay," Audrey Pinson said quietly. "I do not think the professor is right, but he has excited my curiosity. One could picture Brike doing *anything*."

"That's just it," I answered roughly, "and I insist—"

"*You* insist, Mr. Hart?" she queried stiffly.

"I insist on you having some kind of weapon," I said humbly. "I know those brutes, and if Brike worked himself up into a sort of religious frenzy—well, I'm going to give you a pistol so that you can protect yourself."

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"I should probably shoot myself," she said, "and I'm sure I'd never hit what I aimed at."

The professor went to a drawer in a mahogany cabinet.

"Please, Miss Pinson," I said gently, "you don't understand. Brike may be all right when he's in his senses, but when he's worked himself up over some devilish business—I have a jolly little auto-

matic pistol up at my place, and I'll teach you how to use it."

The professor came forward with a small glass tube in his hand. It was sealed at one end, and appeared to contain nothing but cotton-wool.

"Pistols are out-of-date, Miss Pinson," he said—"relics of the last century. Now, this"—he held up the little tube—"is a weapon that any lady might handle. If you pull out the cork, you will find that the head of a needle is stuck in it. The point is guarded with another small cylinder of cork. A single scratch from that point will cause death."

We looked at him, Audrey Pinson with horror in her eyes; and I must confess that I shivered just a little. This seemed an ugly kind of death, and yet, of course, it was much neater and less violent than bloodshed.

"Of course," Turton continued, "you would only use it in an emergency, but it is the sort of thing you could always carry with you. I have a little metal case for it, so that you could never have an accident."

For a few moments there was silence, and then Audrey Pinson held out her hand. Turton went back to his cabinet and returned with a small, metal cylinder.

"There you are," he said, with a laugh. "You can carry it in that pretty little bag of yours; takes up no more room than a thimble-case."

Audrey Pinson placed it in her bag, and then she suddenly laughed.

"What queer ideas people do get into their heads!" she said. "Well, I must be going home."

I walked back with her to the door in the wall of Brent Lodge. I made her talk about herself—her past, her future plans. But, when we had said good-by, I gave her a word of advice:

"There may be nothing in all this nonsense of Turton's," I said, "but you must keep your eyes open. I will be at Turton's cottage every morning now, at twelve o'clock. If you are not there, we shall come and look for you."

She opened the door with a latchkey, smiled at me, and disappeared.

Somewhere in the distance I could hear the *cluck, cluck cluck* of a very self-satisfied fowl.

CHAPTER FIVE

OF COURSE, Saltby laughed at us. He was rather a jolly young fellow, hard-working and hard-headed.

"Poor old Turton!" he said to me, when I told him of Brike and the black fowl. "His head is stuffed with that kind of rubbish—lumber, I call it. For all his medical knowledge and his M. D. of two universities, I don't believe he could prescribe for a patient with measles."

And when I spoke of the little glass tube, Saltby was furious.

"That's going too far!" he shouted. "Turton's an old lunatic; he ought to be locked up. Of course, it's *curare* or something like that."

And he was all for going round to Brent Lodge and taking this little metal cylinder away from Audrey Pinson.

I quieted him down a bit, and at last he admitted that there was no knowing what a nigger might be up to, and that, perhaps—well, if only the girl could be trusted not to scratch her own finger with the rotten needle—

I turned the conversation to Audrey Pinson herself, and he said he'd like to meet her, if it was only to tell her to clear out of Brent Lodge and go home to civilized folk.

"I can't believe she's only down here to try and get old Arum to leave her his money," he said, the next day, after we had met Audrey Pinson in the village. "She doesn't look that sort at all. As for you, you old rogue, I believe you want her to stay! You like to just sit and look at her."

As the days passed by, I began to think that Saltby was right. I did not wish Audrey Pinson to leave Harthaven. Every day I looked forward to meeting her in the village, and then one morning I told her that she had better go—that there was no need whatever for her to stay on at Brent Lodge and try to get on good terms with her uncle.

"He has already made his will," I said, "and he has left you everything but two thousand pounds. The will is in the safe in my library."

And then, as she turned and looked at me, I felt as though I had struck her a blow.

"You think that of me?" she said, rather piteously.

"Well, you told me——"

"Yes, yes; my aunt insisted on it! But my uncle told me all about his will the first time we met. He only wanted to look at me and see what I was like; then he said I could either go or stay, whichever I liked."

"I'm sorry!" I muttered. "But why do you stay?"

She colored a little at that question, and then she said sharply:

"I think I ought to be there to protect him!" and walked hurriedly away from me down the street.

And I was fool enough to wonder whether she really meant what she said. She could hardly imagine that she was able to protect her uncle from Brike. Why, it was a very remote chance that Brike threatened any harm to his employer. Even old Turton's nonsense did not make out Brike to be a criminal.

The next day Audrey Pinson told us that her uncle was very ill—that he had had a bad heart-attack, and had remained unconscious for over an hour.

"Saltby must go round at once," I said. "You are in a position to insist."

"Yes, perhaps," she replied, "but only if my uncle were unable to give any orders. You cannot force a man to see a doctor against his will. My uncle definitely refused to see one just before I left the house."

I turned to Turton with a look of inquiry.

"Saltby must go round when the poor chap is unconscious," he said; "incapable of resistance. Miss Pinson, the next time your uncle has one of these attacks, you must leave the house at once, and go to Dr. Saltby. You know where he lives, don't you?"

"Yes—that pretty little house near the lodge gates. His name is on the door."

"Saltby will probably not be at home," said Turton. "I am a qualified doctor, if degrees have anything to do with it. But, of course, I have no surgery or medicines. Still, if Saltby is not at home, I might be able to help you, Miss Pinson. And in any case I should like to go with Saltby, if I may."

Audrey Pinson raised no objections. I do not think she had any great confidence in Turton as a doctor, but she liked the old man.

"And you can come, too," she said to me. "You can wait downstairs."

I shook my head.

"Ah, well, Miss Pinson," I replied, "I live some way off. There will be no time to waste. Of course, if I am here in the village, I will come. But to get a doctor quickly is the important thing."

I walked back with her to Brent Lodge. She asked me to come in, and I saw Brike pottering about the garden. I went up to him and asked for information.

"Oh, he's better, sir," was the reply, "and no doctor can do him good. I pray for him, sir—night and day. I will see that he does not die."

"Look here," I said, for I thought it best to be quite plain with the fellow, "if Mr. Arum dies, and it's proved that you've kept a doctor from him, you'll be tried for manslaughter."

Brike was unconcerned by the threat. He was neither angry nor afraid.

"I shall do nothing to prevent the doctor from coming to see my master," he replied, with quiet dignity. "Let the young lady send for any doctor she

chooses. But Mr. Arum, sir, will not see him. I will show the doctor into the bedroom—I can do no more than that."

Then he clasped his hands together, and raised his eyes to Heaven. A wild torrent of prayer came from his lips. My suspicions were almost carried away by the earnest force of it. And when the man had finished he pressed his hands to his face, and cried like a child.

I left him, and said a few words to Audrey Pinson. While I was talking to Brike, and listening to the outburst of religious forces, she had asked her uncle if he would see me. Jacob Arum had refused, so there was nothing left for me but to take my departure.

Two days later the summons came from Brent Lodge. I was just going to bed, when a servant brought in a hastily scribbled note from Turton.

"Saltby is away," he wrote, "called to a case of childbirth right out in the marshes. I am going up at once. They *think* Arum is dead. Come as quickly as possible to Brent Lodge."

Five minutes later the car was at the door, and I went out on my short journey. It was a beastly night—the wind blowing half a gale from the east, and the rain, cold as ice, coming down in torrents. The hood gave but little protection, and I was glad of my fur coat, for dress clothes were no more than tissuepaper on a night like this.

"You must drive as fast as you can," I said to the chauffeur, "but don't take any risks. I don't want to walk."

But that was just what I had to do, after all. A hundred yards from the lodge gates, the car came to a standstill. We spent two minutes in trying to locate the trouble, and then I decided to walk. It was not much over half a mile to Brent Lodge. I told the chauffeur to follow me when he'd got the engine running again.

One does not walk quickly in a fur coat, even on a cold night, and though a car can deal with storm and darkness, a man on foot is handicapped by having to grope his way through pools of water, without even a glimpse of light to guide him.

The village street was as dark as the marshland beyond it, and only the riding lights of a few smacks betrayed the existence of a creek. And even when I reached the long wall of Brent Lodge I wasted a minute in trying to find the door. It was open, and I stumbled toward a glimpse of light in the hall.

But it was not until I was inside the house, and the door had shut out the wind and rain, that I received the impression of something evil and unholy in the atmosphere of the place. As I stood there in my dripping coat, I could not hear a sound. The drawing-room door was open, but there was no light in the room. Save for the lamp burning in the hall, there did not seem to be any light at all. No doubt Brike and Turton and Audrey Pinson were upstairs with the dead or dying man.

I experienced a feeling of awkwardness—of being where I ought not to be. I did not quite know whether I ought to grope my way up to the room where I had seen Arum for the first and only time in my life, or to wait until someone came down to look for me.

I took off my coat, and then, shivering with the cold, put it on again. A door opened, and a glow of light streamed across the landing. I saw a shadow against the light, and then, quite suddenly, there came the booming of a tremendous voice.

I could hear the words: *"Oh, Lord, if it be Thy Will to give him back to us. ."* and then the door closed, and Turton emerged from the darkness. He came slowly down the stairs, and told me to take the hall lamp into the drawing-room.

"I'm glad you've come," he said, when he had closed the door. "The poor old chap is dead. Of course, I had no medicine—no stethoscope or anything. I gave him brandy, but he could not swallow it. He's dead right enough—curse that fool Saltby—I think you'd better fetch him in your car."

I explained that the car had broken down. And it did not seem to me that Saltby could be of any use if Arum were dead.

"You've not left that girl upstairs alone with—" I began.

"No, no!" Turton replied. "I persuaded her to go to her bedroom. Will you come upstairs? I think we'd better stay here until Saltby comes."

"Yes, but I'll stay in this room. Do you hear that crazy nigger shouting and groaning? I couldn't stand that. I should want to kick him."

"Still, we ought to know what is going on," Turton insisted. "I think I'd better see. Perhaps I can calm him down a bit. It's terrible for that poor girl."

He struck a match and lit all the candles in the chandelier; then he picked up the lamp in his hand.

"This is the darkest house I was ever in," he said.

When he had left the room I lit a cigarette. My nerves had never been quite what they should be since the war. The roaring of the wind, and the whining of it in the chimney, and the rain beating against the shuttered windows, and that howling negro upstairs produced the sort of effect that shatters all power of thought.

I felt dazed and stupid and very cold. And this pandemonium of sound was horrible—in a house where there should have been silence. I longed for a sight of Audrey Pinson—something fresh and sweet in this abode of queer men and strange noises. The dead man, Brike, even old Turton were fantastic and grotesque.

It was even possible that Brike, at that very moment, was performing his rites and incantations to bring the dead to life again. No, Turton must have been wrong about that. The nigger was praying in an ecstasy of religious madness.

Turton entered the room.

"Door locked," he said. "Can't get in—can't make that fool hear, I suppose. I don't think he's in the room where poor Arum died. He's in the bedroom beyond. I thought I heard the squawk of a fowl, but I wouldn't swear to that. But he's singing the song of the witch-doctors all right. I know it well. I've left the lamp in the hall." Turton spoke with triumph in his eyes. "If only one could see," he said. "I'd give anything to see what's going on."

I suggested that he should break the door open, but Turton would not hear of it.

"Of course, he'd stop at once," he said. "What about the windows? Is there a ladder anywhere?"

I lost my temper.

"Look here, Turton!" I said sharply. "You seem to forget there's a dead man in the house, and a girl crying upstairs. This isn't the time for experiments."

The door opened suddenly, and Audrey Pinson walked unsteadily into the room. Her face was white and her hair disordered, and she pressed her fingers to her ears.

"Stop him—stop the brute!" she cried. "I can't stand it—I can't stand it!"

I led her to a chair. I could see that she had been crying, but there were no tears in her eyes now. She moved her hands and caught hold of my arm.

"It is horrible!" she whispered. "And my poor uncle—"

There was the sound of dancing overhead, and the clapping of hands. It seemed as though there must be several people in the room above. The chandelier rocked, and a lighted candle fell on the floor. I picked it up, and the sounds suddenly ceased. There was nothing to be heard but the roaring of the wind, and the *swish* of the rain on the windows.

"Thank Heaven," I said in a low voice. Turton did not speak. He dashed

out of the room and up the stairs—strangely agile for so old a man—and we could hear him knocking on the door. Audrey Pinson let go of my arm, and bent forward, her hands clasped round her knees. There was fear in her eyes, and I think the sudden silence must have come as a shock to her.

"Brike has worn himself out," I said. "We must see that this kind of thing does not happen again—I must speak to the police. This is *your* house now."

There was the ring of a bell in some distant passage, and a loud knocking on the hall door. I opened it and saw Saltby in a thick overcoat. The rain was running in little streams from his hat.

"Am I in time?" he said.

"No; you are too late," I replied, and then I closed the door behind him, and took him to the far side of the hall, intending to tell him just what had happened.

But Audrey Pinson came out of the drawing-room.

"Oh, Dr. Saltby," she exclaimed, "it may not be too late! Please go upstairs."

I glanced up at the landing, but could see nothing. In the excitement of Saltby's arrival I had forgotten that Turton was up there knocking at the bedroom door. The knocking had ceased; I could not see Turton; and I concluded that he had been admitted to the room.

Saltby flung off his wet coat.

"I came across your car," he said, "just by the lodge gates. That saved a few minutes. I'll go and have a look at the poor old chap. But I don't suppose it's any use. Turton isn't a fool."

He picked up his little bag and began to mount the stairs. I moved as if to follow him, but Audrey Pinson caught hold of my arm.

"Please don't leave me!" she cried.

And Saltby, pausing and looking back at us, said: "You'd better both stay down here. We can't have a crowd in that room."

We returned to the drawing-room. The girl looked worn out, and I suggested that I should fetch her a glass of port or some brandy. She shook her head.

"Don't leave me," she whispered; "please don't leave me."

There was the closing of a door on the landing, and light, quick footsteps coming down the stairs. Then Turton appeared in the doorway. His face was working convulsively, and for a few moments he could not speak.

"The devil's work," he stammered at last. "Something in it, perhaps—I don't know—anyway, *Arum is alive*—"

CHAPTER SIX

SCARCELY half a minute had passed before Saltby entered the room. His face was flushed, and there was an angry light in his eyes.

"The man's alive," he said. "And he was well enough to order me out of the room. I could see he'd been near to death, but he aired his religious views, told me not to interfere with the will of Heaven—all that sort of stuff. Upon my word—"

He paused, remembering that Audrey was present.

"You'd better get to bed, my dear young lady," he said, after a few minutes of silence. "You need not worry about your uncle. I've left medicine and instructions with Brike, if there is another attack. But no need to worry, just go to bed and rest. I'll look around here in the morning."

Audrey was unwilling to take his advice, but we were all against her. At last she smiled and shook hands with us and left the room.

"Now we can talk," said Saltby. "Isn't there a fire in the wretched house? We must stay here a bit."

"I don't want a fire," said Turton, walking up and down the room. "*Saltby, he was dead!* Do you think I don't know a dead man when I see one? The heart had ceased to beat, I tell you; there was no breath on a mirror I held to his lips. I had no stethoscope, of course; but I'd swear the man was dead."

Saltby smiled incredulously.

"And what brought him to life?" he queried.

We told Saltby what we had heard, but he jeered at us.

"Some savage rites, eh?" he said curtly. "Do *you* believe in 'em, Turton?"

Turton admitted that he had always believed them to be frauds practised on simple savages.

"But, mind you," he added, "I wouldn't go so far as to say that there isn't a possibility of something real, some power given to certain—"

"Oh, rats!" Saltby interrupted.

"Well, then, what about prayer?" I queried. "An honest religious belief that prayer, under certain circumstances, will work a miracle?"

Saltby merely shrugged his shoulders.

"The facts are these," he said. "Brike and Miss Pinson could easily be deceived. Only Turton's evidence is worth anything, and he made a mistake. His mind has been kept off *practical* matters for years. Tell me just what you did see, Turton. I apologize for the way I spoke to you just now."

The Professor smiled.

"I knocked half-a-dozen times at the door," he said, "and could not hear a sound on the other side of it. Then I turned the handle gently and found that the door was unlocked. Arum was lying on the sofa in exactly the same position as when I had last seen him. We had bound up his jaw with a clean white handkerchief, and there he lay, with a white face and closed eyes, looking as dead as any dead man I have ever seen.

"And a few feet away from him Brike was kneeling on the floor. The nigger was quite motionless except for his lips, and they moved without any sound coming from them. His hands were clasped across his chest, his eyes were closed, and the sweat was simply pouring off his gray forehead. I tell you, chaps, that I was really sorry for the man.

"And then I saw Arum's eyes open. Well, I am not easily frightened by man or animal, but that did give me a start. However, I kept quite still, and Brike went on praying, and the eyes closed, and then opened again. And then the right hand moved very slowly from under the rug—I call it a hand, but it was really only an iron hook. And then the hook went slowly up to the handkerchief and dropped back. I can tell you it was a horrible sight; and to see Brike still praying, and unconscious of it all, was, I think, even more horrible.

"And then, just as I was going to rush forward, Arum groaned, and Brike heard him, and sprang up from the floor as though he had been shot. And then you never saw such a scene, Brike crying and laughing and kissing his master's left hand, and my efforts to pour out some brandy, and the way we rubbed his limbs to restore the circulation. I was so excited I caught my sleeve on Arum's iron hook. And Arum, if you please, looking at us all the time as though he did not know what had happened, and then Saltby walked into the room."

"Yes," said Saltby, "and I merely said that I was the doctor and that I was glad to see that Arum was so much better. I thought it just as well not to make a fuss. But it was Arum who made the fuss. He cried out when I tried to put my fingers on his pulse. Then he told me to get out of the room. He looked very strange, and a sudden flush had come into his cheeks. Well, I've told you what he said to me, and I thought it best to go. I didn't want to excite him, you see. He might have had an-

other attack, and have gone off altogether."

The door opened and Brike entered the room.

"Very sorry, gentlemen," he said, "but my dear master, he is worried about you all being in the house. I think you will understand."

"Going to turn us out, eh?" said Saltby.

"The master is very angry, sir, with me and Miss Pinson, and everyone. I hope you won't get me into any further trouble, gentlemen. I am in your hands."

"I shall be glad to get to bed, at any rate," I said, with a yawn. "Come along, Professor. We cannot do any good by staying here. You'd better all come round to my place, and we'll have some hot drinks."

Saltby muttered something about the possibility of a doctor being required, but two minutes later we were in the car.

"I think we'll keep all this to ourselves," I said to Saltby, who was sitting by my side in the back seat. "All this nonsense, I mean, about Turton's heathen rites and ceremonies."

"You're right," the young doctor replied. "Turton's a one-idea man, and that makes a fellow a bit queer, you know. I'm sure he believes that Arum was really dead."

THE next morning Audrey Pinson called on me at eleven o'clock.

"I am leaving today," she said, "and I've come to say good-by. I—I am sorry to go."

I told her that no doubt she had come to a right decision.

"After last night," I said—"well, I wondered you even stayed in the house last night."

"Oh, it isn't that," she replied. "My uncle has told me to go. He was furious with me for bringing Dr. Saltby and Professor Turton into the house, trying to fight God, instead of praying to Him, as he puts it. He is going to alter his will."

"Oh, I must talk to him about that," I exclaimed. "It would be most unjust—most unfair. I will take all the blame on myself. And I must let him know the truth about Brike."

"The professor's ideas?"

"Yes. Your uncle thinks that Brike's prayers—well, he shall know the truth. I am very sorry you are going. I shall miss you."

She was silent. She might have said, "It's very nice of you to say that." But she said nothing, and I was glad. Such a commonplace remark would have thrown cold water on my hopes, on my belief that she had stayed on at Brant Lodge, not because she wished to protect her uncle, but because she wished to see more of me.

"It's very dull and lonely in this village," I continued, "and I think I shall go up to London for a time. Will you give me your address?"

She gave it—a house in an obscure street in West Kensington—and I wrote it down in my address-book.

"You look as if you wanted a really good time," I went on, "and when I come to London I'll see that you get it."

For a few minutes neither of us spoke. I do not know what she was thinking about, but my own thoughts were clear enough.

"If I ride too hard," I said to myself, "I ride for a fall."

I really did believe that Audrey had stayed on in Harthaven because she wished to see me and talk to me, and find out just what sort of fellow I was. But as yet we knew very little of each other. That did not matter to me. I knew the one essential thing—that I was in love with her. But I was not vain enough to think that she could decide so easily on the most important matter in her life.

"I want waking up a bit," I continued after a pause. "They've offered me a job at the Foreign Office. I think I shall take it. Anyhow, I must go to town, and you'll come to some theatres, won't you?"

She laughed and held out her hands.

"I shall be awfully glad to see you," she said. "One can be just as dull in London as in Harthaven. And, really, I have had quite a lot of excitement down here."

I smiled grimly and took her hand, and held it for a few moments.

"I think you've behaved splendidly," I said.

A servant entered the room, and said that Brike wished to see me.

"I'll see him in here," I replied; and then I turned to Audrey: "You'd better stay. I think I know what he wants."

Brike was shown into the room. He handed me a note. It was from Jacob Arum, just a few scrawling lines to ask me to return his will and the inventory.

"How am I to know that *you* did not write this?" I said bluntly to Brike.

The man was quite unmoved by the insult. He turned to Audrey.

"I think," he said gently, "that the young lady knows that Mr. Arum is going to make a fresh will."

"Yes," the girl replied. "My uncle told me so."

I handed over the will and the inventory to Brike.

"I have a nice story about you," I said sharply. "Your master will be pleased to hear of all that happened last night."

"It was the mercy of God, sir," said Brike; and he took his departure.

He was out of sight when I walked through the Park with Audrey to the lodge gates. She seemed to care nothing for the loss of the money. And I looked on that as a good sign. It was as though she had made up her mind to marry me. No doubt she regarded me as a rich man. She knew nothing of my losses during the war, of the extravagance of the uncle, from whom I had inherited the property.

Well, there would be enough for us to live upon anyway, and I could earn more. Poverty is a good thing if it makes a man work.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DURING the next few days I tried hard to obtain an interview with Jacob Arum, but he would not see me, and he even wrote me another letter, stating definitely that he had no intention of breaking the habits of years, and requesting me not to annoy him.

I wrote back a full account of what had happened on the night when he was so near to death. And I knew that he received it, because he acknowledged the receipt, and said that he had every confidence in "my God-fearing and trusty servant, William Brike."

The whole plot seemed now quite clear, and Turton had contributed to the success of it. Jacob Arum really believed that Brike's prayers had worked a miracle. And Brike had admitted the doctor to the room simply in order to set Jacob Arum against his niece.

Perhaps Brike knew his master was not dead. Perhaps, on the other hand, Brike had performed those heathen rites and ceremonies, believing that he could restore the dead to life. But, from whichever point of view one looked at it, Brike had come out on top. In the eyes of his master he was a man whose prayers had been answered.

There was nothing more to be done in the matter, and a week after Audrey had taken her departure I went up to London.

I made myself very pleasant to Audrey's aunt, and I had a long talk with her about Jacob Arum. She knew little or nothing about the man, and had never even set eyes on him. She had not even known Audrey's mother, but was "looking after the girl" for her brother's sake.

During the month that I stayed in town, I saw Audrey nearly every day

and took her to theatres, dances, and music-halls. Our friendship gave place to the close ties of love, and the day before I returned to Harthaven we were engaged to be married.

On the very day that I left London I received a letter from Turton, telling me that Jacob Arum and Brike had taken their departure from Brent Lodge, that the house was not to be sold, but that most of the contents were to be put up to auction at Christie's. I called to see Turton on my way from the station, and he handed me an envelope posted in London.

"From our friend Arum," he said. "It was only delivered here this morning."

I took the letter from its open envelope and read it.

"Dear Professor Turton" (Arum had written) "It may interest you to know that your conduct has driven me from the house where I hoped to have ended my days in peace. Your talk of devils and enchantments, and horrible savage rites became unbearable. It is such people as your that make village life in England impossible to those who want rest.—JACOB ARUM."

I laughed and laid the letter down on the table.

"I suppose you have been pretty busy," I said; and then I told him the great news, and he shook me warmly by the hand.

"I suspected it," he chuckled; "I suspected it. Oh, I've got eyes for witchcraft—whatever form it takes."

I asked him to dine with me that night, and, as I passed Saltby's house, I saw the doctor at the window, and stopped the car. He came hurrying out, and I told him that I was going to marry Audrey Pinson.

"Best of luck, old chap," he said. "By the by, our friend—"

"I know, I know," I interrupted. "You're to dine with me tonight—at half-past seven. A sort of celebration. Old Turton is coming. We'll have a jolly good dinner. I wired instructions yesterday."

I told the chauffeur to drive on. Saltby wanted to talk about Jacob Arum—I was sure of that. And I had had no food since half-past eight in the morning.

I CAN only tell you that Turton bored us to tears that night. He talked about witchcraft and devils and rites and incantations until I really began to think that he had gone completely off his head. If he had been a young man, we should have thrown cushions at him and sat on his head. As it was, we could only be rude. But Turton, with a certain amount of drink inside him, was as obstinate as a mule and as thick-skinned as a rhinoceros. He wandered off into all sorts of bypaths, but he always returned to the starting-place—his firm belief that Jacob Arum had actually died, and had been raised to life again by Brike's witchcraft.

"I know the man was dead," he kept on saying. "I'm not a fool. If that whippersnapper Saltby knew half as much as I do, he'd be a consulting physician in Harley Street by now."

We were forced at last to take Turton as a joke, and we chaffed him unmercifully. He was more sensitive to ridicule than he was to direct insult, and he lost his temper about half-past ten, when we were in the middle of a game of snooker pool. He flung down his cue, put on his coat, and announced his intention of going home.

"You're a couple of turnips," he said; "and I think a turnip is the most beastly vegetable in the world. I tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to spend the rest of tonight in that house, and perhaps the whole of tomorrow, and I'll bet you each a hundred pounds that I find proofs of Brike's deviltries!"

We laughed, but when he had left the room, I said to Saltby:

"He's drunk, or gone clean off his head. You must go with him."

"I'm blessed if I do," Saltby replied. "Let him break his own neck if he likes."

"He is an old man," I pleaded; "and an old friend. And, of course, he's furious that he made that mistake about Jacob Arum. Come, Saltby, be a sportsman."

"He's spoilt our jolly evening," grumbled the young doctor. "Oh, well, I'll go. After all, I don't want him to fall into the creek."

They took their departure, old Turton muttering to himself, and Saltby very silent and dignified. I returned to the library, and sat before the fire.

I was not sorry that the evening had ended so abruptly. I wanted to be alone with my very pleasant thoughts of Audrey Pinson.

THE next morning I walked down into the village, called at Saltby's house, and learned that he had been out all night—that he had returned at eleven o'clock the night before, had put a cake and a flask of brandy in his pockets, and had said that he might not be back until lunch.

Further on, in the village, I went to Turton's cottage, and found that Turton—much to the distress of his old housekeeper—had slipped a scribbled note under the door, saying that he would not be home until late the following day, and that he would like cold pheasant for supper. It was evident to me that they were both at Brent Lodge, and I decided to go there to look for them.

It was a cold morning, and the fog, though not thick enough to prevent one from walking along at a brisk rate, made it impossible to see more than a few yards ahead. And so it came about that when I neared the high brick wall of Brent Lodge, and saw a vague black mass looming through the mist, I thought for a moment that I had lost my way, and was face to face with one of the numerous tarred wooden cottages in the village.

Another half-dozen steps, and I realized that it was only an enormous furniture van. A foreman was sitting on the tail of it, smoking a pipe.

"Hallo!" I said. "Going to move all this stuff to be sold at Christie's?"

"Goin' to move it, sir," the man replied; "but it 'as bin sold, and I 'ear a nice price was paid for it, too."

"Who bought it?" I queried.

"Mr. Ruben, sir, of Bond Street; we're goin' to take it all up today. There'll be two more vans along here before noon."

The news rather surprised me, for Turton had distinctly stated that the contents of the house were to be put up to auction.

"Seen two gentlemen about?" I asked.

"Yes, sir, I saw 'em—diggin' in the garden; no business of mine."

Two workmen came out with a table carefully wrapped in matting.

"Twenty-three," shouted one of them; and the foreman ticked off the number in his book. It was evident that Brike and Arum had indexed and ticketed everything before they left the house.

I passed through the door into the garden. One could not even see the house. A few rose bushes and some shrubs showed indistinctly.

I had no intention of walking through that long wet grass, hunting for Turton and Saltby. If they chose to dig in the garden that was their own affair. I imagined that it was some nonsense of Turton's. No doubt he was looking for the bodies of black fowls.

I entered the house, and saw that everything was packed for removal, and that each label bore a number and a description of the article to which it was attached. I lit my pipe and chatted with the workmen. One of them had seen

Turton an hour before I arrived. Turton had come in from the garden covered with mud, and had washed his face and hands.

"Queer old bloke," said the man. "Asked me if I'd ever seen a witch. I looked a bit ugly at 'im and 'e give me a cigar."

I strolled out into the garden again, stood on the flagged path for a minute, and then saw a man running toward me out of the fog. It was Saltby, muddy from head to foot.

"Here, you chap!" he cried, and then, seeing who it was, he said, "My God, Hart, old Turton was right, after all!"

"Right?" I queried.

"Yes, about Jacob Arum. The fellow's dead enough. We've just come across his body—three feet down. *Ugh!*"

He pulled a flask from his pocket, and drank.

"Come here," he said. "I'll show you."

UNFORTUNATELY, we brought neither of the scoundrels to trial.

I say "unfortunately," because, no doubt, we should have got every detail of the truth out of them in a Court of Law. They were tracked down to a remote village in Cornwall, and Brike shot one of the detectives who had been sent to arrest him.

After that there could be no question of mercy. Brike and the other man were hunted from place to place and, driven at last into an empty cottage, they again showed fight and were both killed in a siege that lasted for nearly two days.

We recovered nearly all the money *and* the will, which Brike had kept, doubtless with the idea of retaining a hold over his companion.

The "other man" was Michael Arum—Jacob's twin brother. Proof of this was found among the papers in Michael's pocket. Further inquiries, in which the elder Miss Pinson was able to give us some assistance, elicited the fact that he was supposed to have died many years ago, and that he had been a thorough scoundrel, who had served a long term of imprisonment for forgery.

The likeness between the two brothers was extraordinary, and when it is remembered that Audrey Pinson and Turton were the only persons who had seen both of them, and that Turton had never heard Jacob Arum speak, and that Audrey had only seen Michael Arum in a very dim light, it is not so very odd that they did not observe the very slight difference between the twins.

Well, of course, you will ask why Brike did not just bury Jacob Arum and let Michael take his place without telling anyone of Jacob Arum's death. That, on the surface, would seem to have been the simplest plan. But Brike was far too subtle for that. You see, he wanted a doctor's evidence that Jacob Arum was really dead, in case Brike should have been accused of murdering him, if ever the plot was discovered.

Brike had deliberately made Turton an unwitting accomplice, knowing, as he did, that the old professor was steeped in witchcraft, and had lost touch with more practical matters.

Thus, Turton's evidence of Jacob Arum's death would help to clear Brike of a possible charge of murder; also—and this was equally important—Turton's evidence of the supposed reincarnation would help to throw dust in the eyes of those inclined to suspect foul play. The supposition being that although Turton's word as a doctor might possibly be doubted, his evidence, as a recognized authority on witchcraft, of the reincarnation, would be respected.

Brike had run tremendous risks; for instance, someone might have discovered that Michael Arum had actually sacrificed his right hand in order to get this money. Someone, too, might have seen Michael smuggled into the house. No doubt Brike had rowed him down the creek and landed him, as he had landed Audrey Pinson, at the foot of the garden.

How long Michael had lain hidden in Brent Lodge, waiting for the moment when the breath should leave his brother's body, we never shall know. Most certainly the truth would never have been known if Brike had not been so very clever.

It was his cleverness that was his undoing. Turton had searched the garden, not for Jacob Arum's body, but for evidence of the witchcraft which—so Turton firmly believed—had restored Jacob Arum's life.

Turton had an idea that the carcasses of the two fowls would have been buried in the garden. He found a spot where it seemed to him that the earth was a little higher than the rest of the surface. And there he had elected to dig. Saltby had helped him.

You can picture the faces of these two men when the iron hook and maimed stump of Jacob Arum's arm came through the earth.

There was no trace of foul play. Jacob Arum had died of heart failure. The whole plan had been magnificently conceived, and, but for Turton's dabbling in negro magic, the truth might never have come to light.

And I rather think that my good wine played some part in the matter. It was just a straw thrown into the scale of Turton's sensitively balanced brain.

Of course, everything had been in Brike's favor from the start. Jacob Arum's dislike of his fellow men; the fact that he had lost his right hand and could not write properly; his faith which forbade him to call in a doctor; the nature of his property, which could be sold at any moment for cash; his real affection for his servant—all these combined to put Brike in a very strong position.

Still, it was a bold plan, skillfully conceived and executed, and, but for the bee in old Turton's bonnet, it would have been rewarded with success.

THE END

A Short Tale of Black Superstition

BLACK CUNJER

By ISABEL WALKER

BLACK CUNJER'S CABIN was in the thick of the pine woods where the saw-mill had been located for a month. It had proved difficult to find any negroes in that vicinity willing to work there; money was no object when they feared Black Cunjer's wrath.

They believed he exercised a sort of proprietorship over the forest—a claim much stronger than that of the actual property owners, a corporation which knew nothing and cared less about local superstition. Certain it is that from time immemorial Black Cunjer had lived in the heart of the woods, where the pines grew closest and the shadows made twilight of midday. There, it was whispered, within a semi-circle of tall trees he worshipped his god, and burned fire before him on black nights.

It was a mystery how the ancient negro managed to subsist, for there was no garden, nor cultivated acres about his dilapidated cabin. It was rumored that he ate bats and moles, and that this repulsive fare gave him "night eyes," so he could see in the dark. His eyes did have a curiously blank expression, imparting to his wizened face an unearthly aspect.

No one knew Black Cunjer's age; the negroes thought he came straight from Africa two hundred years ago. Judge Blake said he remembered when the old man had been a boy on his father's plantation, and that he clung to the cabin in the pine woods now, because his young wife had died there years ago and was buried in the semi-circular space of trees. Because they guarded her rest, and witnessed his religious rites for her soul, he had grown to regard the pines as sacred.

It was true that Judge Blake appeared to be the only person of either race with whom the solitary negro ever held communication, but the judge, after all, was in his dotage and given to queer fancies. In spite of the fact that a few had seen—so they said—a mound under the tallest trees resembling a grave, it was impossible to connect Black Cunjer with human ties, however long past.

On the rare occasions when he appeared among the negroes, they were excessively polite, but after nightfall they shunned his cabin as a haunted spot.

The order had gone forth that the entire pine woods must be cut. Some of the logs were to be shipped down the river, and the rest cut into cord wood before the end of September. Work had progressed slowly, for there had been much trouble in securing and keeping enough men for the job; finally, about midsummer, a new foreman was sent down with orders to rush things through at all costs.

This foreman was a huge, hulking brute called Hock Oberman. He came from "out yonder," with a record for getting results. He had worked only among the lowest class of laborers—mainly foreigners—and rose to his present position by his undoubted power over subordinates. He had had no previous experience with "niggers," but he boasted to the few poor whites, who would consort with him in the village, that he'd sweat the soul out of those fool blacks for once in their lives, and get the pine woods cleaned up on schedule time.

For a month after his arrival at the sawmill the work progressed much more quickly. From early dawn until sunset the *chug-chug* of the engine mingled with the voices of the negroes as they felled the trees, hauled the logs, or joked around the campfire at night.

Oberman was a great drinker, and it began to be rumored that he supplied the workmen with liquor. He always said—when questioned—that he "had a system," accompanying this cryptic remark with a wink from his small, close-set, cruel eyes.

It seemed to work—for a time. Finally all of the larger trees had been cut, except those surrounding Black Cunjer's cabin, for the radius of half a mile. Then trouble began. For some reason, the gang sent day after day to fell those trees returned empty-handed. Once, three axes broke in succession; another time, a gnarled pine, falling on a workman, seriously injured him.

The day after this catastrophe Oberman drove the negroes out to the woods with threats and curses. They went, muttering sullenly. But less than an hour afterward, in the midst of crashing thunder and livid streaks of lightning, they came running back to camp, nor could they be moved to stir beyond shelter for the rest of that day.

Oberman raged and swore in a frenzy. Utterly ignorant of the type of creature he was dealing with, he could stir no response from the sulky group of negroes.

Then something happened that again gave him the upper hand.

After the storm a steady drizzle had set in; now, at nightfall, the gray skies and cold rain made the gloom inside the rude buildings less preferable than the fire built under a shed. This was open on three sides, facing the branch road which skirted the edge of the forest.

The few white laborers whom Oberman had brought down with him were inside the bunkhouse playing cards by the light of several tin lanterns swung from the low roof. But the negroes were huddled around the fire outside, talking softly among themselves, now that Oberman had finished his harangue.

Tom, a strapping, light-colored negro, who the foreman said was the only one with a spoonful of brains, spoke in a vibrant undertone that sent an electric tenseness through the group:

"Dyah he now," Tom said—"dyah ole Black Cunjer comin' up de road straight to'ard dis camp! Lordy, lordy, he gwine trick us all. . . he say nobody cyant cross his threshold—he gwine cross ourn now"—his voice died in a sort of wail.

Oberman whirled round on them.

"You damned fools—what can one old half dead nigger do against all this bunch? If you just wasn't afraid of him—like me—you'd see some sense!" His voice rose boastfully. "I bet I can look at him—and he'll go where he belongs."

If the bent figure slowly approaching the shed heard these words he gave no sign. The negroes, moaning, shrank closer together. Oberman seized his chance to show them. Raising his voice, he shouted across the dim curtain of mist:

"Go on where you come from, nigger; we don't allow no tramps here!"

He came forward threateningly, as if to drive the old man away.

IT IS doubtful if Black Cunjer ever had the slightest intention of coming up the path from the road. Certainly he did not quicken his lagging pace, nor notice the foreman or the trembling group of negroes.

There was about his unhurried advance a certain dignity, despite his tattered garments and shuffling gait. He came straight forward until he was opposite the shed and hardly ten feet away. The firelight shone redly on his dusky features as he passed. Oberman approached swaggeringly.

Then Black Cunjer looked up, his blank eyes fixed for a moment upon the mottled countenance of the foreman. Without a word, he turned into the underbrush and headed toward the uncut woods. In another moment the night and the mist had hidden him from the straining eyes.

A breath of relief escaped the negroes, like a long-drawn sigh of the pine branches above their heads. Oberman moved nearer the fire, and gave a thick laugh.

"Now you see it's all your tom-fool notions about 'tricks' and 'cunjer.' I ain't hurt—am I?"

He rubbed his hairy hands together as if greatly elated.

"He darsn't harm none of you while you're working for me! I could twist him up like a piece of paper—that old nigger—huh—" he snapped his fingers. "He knows it, too, and if he ever gets the bunch of you locoed again—I'm going to his darn shack you are all so 'fraid of—and *fix* him, for good!"

The negroes gazed in silent awe at the huge hands that gripped together at the last words. It was rumored among the workmen that Oberman had killed a man "out yonder" with those hands.

After some bottles were handed around a more cheerful spirit animated the group. Tom announced that he wasn't afraid of that old Cunjer, anyhow, that he'd been "puttin' on" all the while.

"Yass, niggers, I's goin' to chop down dat crap o' pines t'morrow mawnin'. Mis' Oberman is right, money look good ter me. Who gwine foller?"

Several volunteered, and Oberman promised to double every man's pay the moment they cut the last tree.

So with a general undercurrent of good-fellowship, the fire was banked, and the camp turned in for the night.

OBERMAN watched the woodcutters leave at dawn.

When they were out of sight he turned, a glitter in his small eyes, to Ed Parker, the white man who helped him run the sawmill.

"Niggers is just like other hands—they got to be treated rough to learn 'em sense; when they get a real man to boss 'em"—he slapped his thigh jocosely—"they'll come under all right! This hoodoo stuff"—he spat, sneering,—"makes me tired."

"Well, I hopes we finish this job on time. Big money in it if we do—and hell to pay if we don't," Ed remarked.

Sundown came, without the gang. Oberman stopped work, and walked about impatiently. Presently, from the edge of the woods, he spied the two white laborers returning.

Rushing forward, he demanded, with many oaths, where the negroes were. They related briefly that while they were measuring the first lot of trees, they heard a cry from the negroes, and turned to see them running headlong from the pines. After following them to their homes miles away, the white men learned that Black Cunjer had appeared to the group and told them those were sacred trees, and if they cut down so much as one other, he would set his mark on them and their children.

Entreaties—extra money—threats proved vain. Nothing on earth could induce those negroes to return to the neighborhood of Black Cunjer.

When Oberman heard this story, even the rough laborers shrank from the blasphemy that poured from his lips. His sense of power, swollen the preceding night, his confident boasts of this very day—served to lash his fury to madness. He had been fooled, mocked at, by a miserable old scarecrow of a creature.

Well, Hock Oberman would show them—he'd give these niggers a lesson they'd never forget!

With this threat, he started off on a run toward the foot-path leading into the pines. The men began half-heartedly to follow, but they were all dead tired, and soon gave up the attempt.

Oberman ran deeper and deeper into the woods; his breath came in gasps, and sweat poured from his body. He slowed his pace to a walk, but still pushed ahead, heedless of the sheet lightning and the muttering thunder.

Just before the last bit of daylight faded, he reached the cabin, and with his clenched fist struck the sagging door.

It opened soundlessly, and like a shadow Black Cunjer rose from the threshold.

WITH a volley of oaths, Oberman demanded why he had sent his workmen away—when he would get them back—and ended by threatening the old negro's life unless he had every man in place by the next morning.

During this tirade, Black Cunjer spoke not a syllable, his expressionless eyes staring into the distorted face before him with a curious, unseeing gaze. This silence and impassivity stirred Oberman's resentment as no words could have done.

As he stepped up on the log threshold, a sharp exclamation tore through his lips, and he moved aside so quickly as to lose his balance. But, recovering himself, his rage ten times greater, he seized the ancient negro by the back of his neck and shook him until the shrunken black head rolled from side to side—then released him with a cruel twist.

Black Cunjer's head struck with powerful force against the door-jamb, his thin body crumpled up, and he fell headlong across the threshold, prone at Oberman's feet.

With an ugly laugh, the foreman stepped down on the rotting log, and stirred the prostrate body with his boot. A slow purple stream was trickling from Black Cunjer's temple, and Oberman noticed the tip of his boot was wet with the dark blood.

He leaned over and felt the negro's heart. It was still.

Giving a shudder of repulsion, he scraped his boot against the log, then wiped it on the ground covered with pine needles, and turned to go back, blind fury still seething in his brain.

As Oberman hurried down the narrow path between the crowding tree trunks, his right foot felt wet, as if he had water in his boot. He tried to ignore it, but when the foot became stiff and cold, though he was panting with the heat, he stopped and, leaning against a tree, ran his fingers down the boot to investigate.

He drew them out sopping wet, and by the sheet lightning, which grew momently brighter, he looked at them curiously. They were covered with blood!

Trembling, terrified, he managed with difficulty to pull off the boot. The blood that soaked his foot kept welling up from some secret source, and dripping slowly on the ground.

Cold sweat stood out on Oberman's forehead as he stared down at the foot with which he had contemptuously touched Black Cunjer's body.

FINALLY he thrust his boot back on, and went limping with desperate haste toward the camp, calling aloud in

his fear and agony, and leaving behind him a widening crimson track.

Sometimes he tripped on the roots and stones and fell prostrate in the darkness; lank pine braches tore at his clothing; the sharp needles stung his staring eyes. Once his voice died away and gasping sobs shook his body, but he managed to stumble to his feet again and lurch shrieking through the night. At last the men came running with lanterns in their hands.

When they reached him he was no longer able to speak, but pointed to his right foot covered with blood. A few moments later, when they got him to camp, he was dead.

In that isolated community, the coroner, thirty miles down the river, could not be reached before Oberman had to be buried. Even the men who found him were able to give small information to the neighboring farmers. They had had to cut the boot off, and in their hurry and excitement could not remember having seen any mutilation of the leather.

The search party, sent back at gray dawn to the cabin, found Black Cunjer lying where he had fallen. And Tom, who had been induced to go with them, found something else. Three broken ax blades were cunningly embedded deep in the rotting wood at the outer margin of the threshold, sharp edges uppermost, forming a triangle. In spite of Tom's warning cry, one of the men dislodged the blades, revealing a fragment of dried snake's skin pinioned beneath each one.

The negro lifted an ashy face from his inspection.

"Dyah de Cunjer," he muttered shakenly: "three uv 'em—side by side—no man cyant cross dat do' sill—"

And with a terrified glance over his shoulder, he fled precipitously from the group gathered around the half-open door, and was soon lost to sight in the distance.

THE PINES about Black Cunjer's cabin have never been cut down. No ax will ever be heard again in that forest, nor any sound but the hooting of owls, and the whirring of bats' wings, or, far overhead, the whisper of tall trees.

American Has 1,500,000 Dope Fiends

ACCORDING to the reports of narcotic inspectors, one person in every seventy-three in the United States today is a drug addict. Each addict, it is said, fastens the drug habit on three normal persons during his life. It is declared there are 1,500,00 persons in America who cannot exist without their daily or hourly "shots" of dope, and who are rapidly sinking into a state of horror.

Monte Carlo Casino Yields Huge Annual Profit

DESPITE the fact that, each year, thousands of people journey to the gambling casino at Monte Carlo with carefully thought out "systems" calculated to break the bank, the ivory balls on the flashing roulette wheels netted that institution 65,860,170 francs ($4,530,000) last season.

Girl Afflicted With Strange Malady

A STRANGE case of insanity is that of a prominent young woman of Danville, Illinois, who has been sent to the State Hospital for the Insane at Kankakee. The girl was obsessed with he idea that her health was failing and could be restored only by tobacco. She therefore bought large quantities of smoking and chewing tobacco, which she used in an effort to "become large and strong."

THE RED MOON

BY CLARK ASHTON SMITH

The hills, a-throng with swarthy pine,
Press up the pale and hollow sky,
And the squat cypresses on high
Reach from the lit horizon-line.

They reach, they reach, with gnarled hands—
Malignant hags, obscene and dark—
While the red moon, a demons'-ark,
Is borne along the mystic lands.

Woman Weds Twins; Can't Tell Them Apart

FRAU MARIE TELDER of Innsbruck, Austria, appeared before the local magistrate and complained that she had married a man and had since been living with his twin in the belief that he was her husband. The twins are so much alike, she said, that she could scarcely tell one from the other, but certain circumstances recently led her to believe that the man with whom she is now living is not the man she married.

Caterpillar Army Halts Train

A GIGANTIC army of caterpillars, after devastating many orchards in Oregon, crawled upon the railroad tracks and delayed the Albany-Newport train for one hour and twenty-five minutes. The horde of insects drove one man from his home, destroyed all vegetation in their path, and then began eating the needles from fir trees and the bark from other trees. The caterpillars were more than an inch deep on the railroad tracks, and the trainmen exhausted their sand supply in trying to pass over them.

Man Is Tried for Thirty-three Murders

VAS KOMAROV, a Russian, was recently tried in Moscow for murdering thirty-three persons, and, because of the wide public interest in the unusual case, the trial was held in the large Polytechnic Museum instead of a court room. Before his trial, Komarov said he hoped the court would speedily condemn him to be shot, and added that he found "murder an awfully easy thing." He said that the only victim who ever resisted him was a man who had tried to cheat him in a horse trade. The others were knocked on the head with a hammer or strangled.

Author Sues "Egyptian Spook"

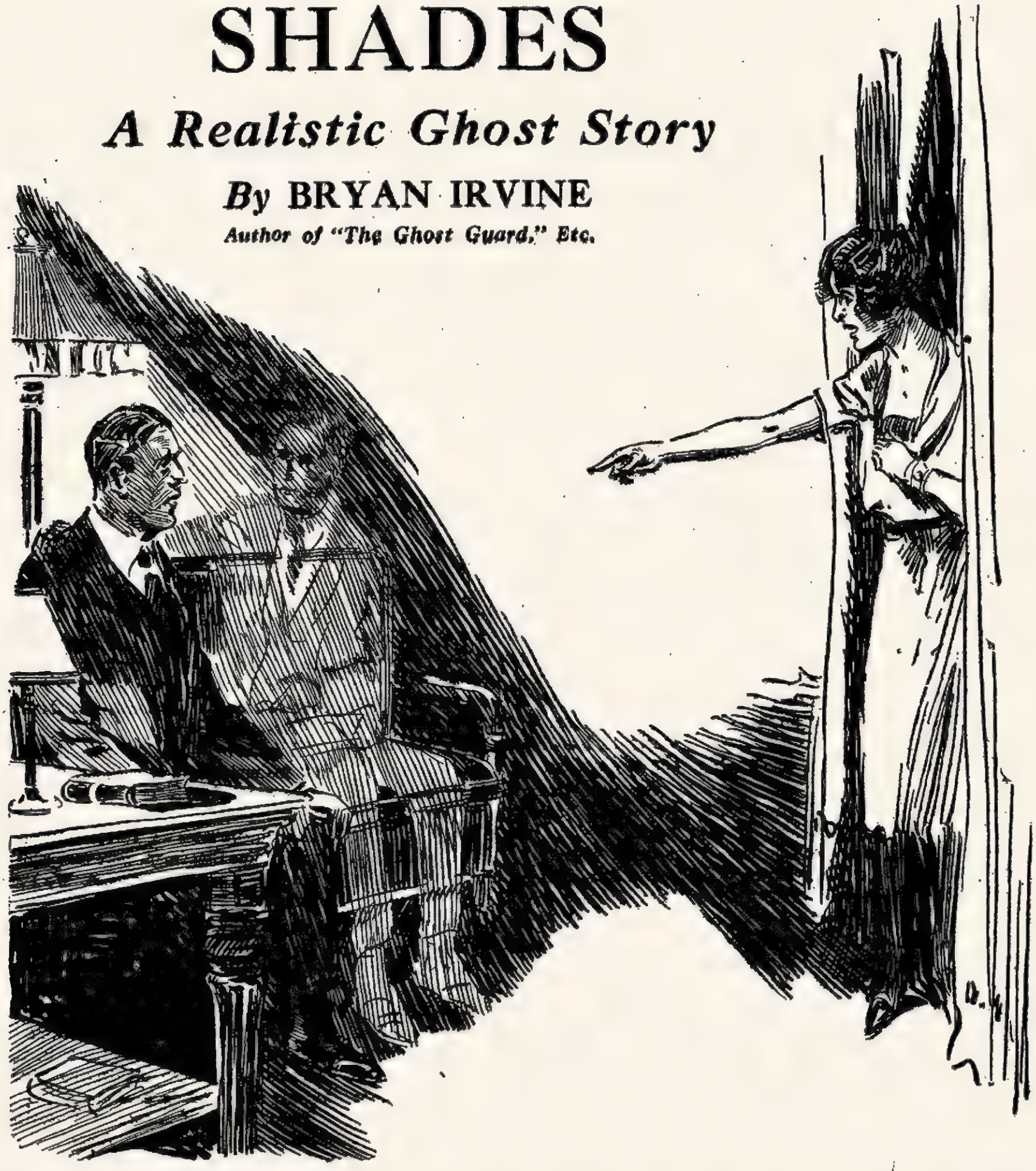
MIMI STEFANESCO, famous medium of Bucharest, has been sued for one million francs libel by Maurice Dewaleffe, French author, who claims that she is an impostor. The trouble arose over an Egyptian romance by M. Dewaleffe and Mimi's claim that she was in constant communication with ancient Egyptians, who told her a connected story of romantic happenings in the court of King Amenophias IV.

SHADES

A Realistic Ghost Story

By **BRYAN IRVINE**

Author of "The Ghost Guard," Etc.



IT IS A plainly furnished room— almost squalid. Except for some black velvet tapestries here and there, it has the appearance of a living-room of a person who has little of the worldly goods.

Seated at a small table in the center of the room is a little old woman. Her head is bent forward, her eyes are closed. She is talking in a low, sometimes barely audible voice. Now the words come clear and distinct; again they are an unintelligible mutter.

The woman is a spirit medium.

Two men sit near her and listen. They are prominent members of a psychological research society. Noted scientists they are, and cynical, skeptical. Now they glance at each other and smile superciliously as the woman's voice falters, halts and goes on again.

I, too, am in the room. I see everything about me, I hear every spoken word. I move about, trying, ever trying, to make my presence known, to be seen.

Oh, why does not that conceited, skeptical ass look at me, *see* me? I stand directly before him and peer into his very soul. They are fools, these men who have studied so much, learned so much, and yet know so little!

I am a ghost.

The woman knows I am here. She is

endeavoring to get my story across, but the combined influence of two skeptic minds in the room continually breaks the subtle accord of her mind with my mind.

My mind? Why, of course I have a mind. In fact, *mind* is all I am. I am merely a continuation of thoughts, attributes, desires and emotions that for many years were born in my once material brain and permeated my material being.

I am but a personality detached from a material body and all earthly matter; an invisible, wandering tramp—a ghost! For such was the transformation at death.

My difficulty since death has been my inability, or, rather, my unwillingness, to depart from reality, even though reality has forsaken me. As a material being, I was an intense materialist. I literally swam in the gratification of earthly desires, whims and pleasures.

I am loath to depart from these things I loved, therefore I am being punished and I am my own punisher. For such is the law of life and death. My old friends on earth know me not, see me not, hear me not. Though I mingle with them, play with them, laugh and cry with them, they do not reciprocate. I am a lonely, homeless, friendless ghost.

This is hell!

My flesh and blood being was a criminal.

I know not how long I have been a ghost, because I know nothing of the passage of time. In my present state I will never grow old. I live in the ever present, accursed *now*. I am tireless; I never sleep; I simply wander about my old earthly haunts and wish, wish, *wish!* Also I regret. I long for a material smile, a flesh-and-blood handclasp. I am denied these things.

Yet, in my present state, I have been seen by mortals. Terry Dolson saw me one night at the old swimming pool on our farm where he and I as small boys spent many happy hours. Terry was my chum in our boyhood days. He was my chum still when we attended college. He was my pal when we renounced society and turned to a life of crime.

Daniel Griswold, the prison guard, saw me one night as I stood before the closed door of my old cell at the penitentiary.

Herman Damstead—poor old Herman!—saw me at the gang's old rendezvous at Mother Maldrene's place.

Marie saw me seated on the divan in her apartment. I loved Marie. Perhaps if I had not loved her I would not now be a ghost. She was one of the most beautiful and accomplished members of America's criminal aristocracy.

I love Marie still. Curse my weakness! Why cannot I forsake reality as others do when they die? There is something better than this—somewhere.

Yes, as a ghost I have been seen by flesh-and-blood beings. These are not pleasant recollections, however; to see those of the flesh, whose friendship and love was my joy on earth, cringing in abject terror before me, a nameless fear showing in their eyes, their faces contorted with a horrible expression akin to mania. Indeed, they are not pleasant recollections.

The medium's voice is more distinct now, though those two skeptics continue to sneer. I remain directly in front of one of the men. I will continue to peer into his eyes and perhaps he will see me before the seance is closed.

There is another ghost in the room. Yes, I know this ghost.

BUT to my story:

Upon our graduation from college we, Terry and I, pooled our interests and established a newspaper. We selected as our field one of the most politically and morally corrupt cities in America. It was our aim to whitewash this city of sin. Our paper failed miserably in less than a year, leaving us almost penniless.

Our next venture was as dealers in real estate. Business was poor; it grew worse. We arrived at our office one morning to find a writ of attachment posted in a conspicuous place near the door. We were broke!

What next? Never for an instant did we consider parting and trying our luck in different fields. It seemed to have been tacitly agreed that we should remain pals, partners and friends, whether fortune smiled or adversity crushed.

Ours was a friendship—aye, love!—in which the test of time had failed to find a flaw. Twenty years we had been chums, sympathetic and understanding. We remained so until—until . . . But that will be told later.

Broke and discouraged, Terry and I returned to our modest bachelor quarters. I well remember the day; how I endeavored to make light of our difficulties; how Terry sat hunched in a chair reading the "help wanted" column in the morning paper.

Suddenly he tossed the paper aside and rose with an exclamation of disgust.

"Hal, listen to me," he said, standing over me as I lay on the davenport. "I can name not less than one hundred wealthy men in this city who amassed their fortunes through systematic, 'legalized' robbery. The police system of this city as well as many other municipalities in this country is corrupt—rotten to the core.

"Our penitentiaries are full of men who took big chances for small stakes. The real criminals—the big fellows—walk our streets unmolested. It isn't fair. Would it be more criminal to rob these big criminals systematically of their ill-gotten gains than for the big fellows to rob the masses under their camouflage of legitimate business, or under the purchased protection of the law?"

I rose to a sitting posture and looked my pal in the eye. He had evidently read the thoughts that had been passing through my brain for many days.

"It would not, Terry," I answered emphatically.

"Then why should we remain penniless puppets of circumstance?" Terry asked. His chin had advanced belligerently, and the tense lines of his rather boyish face indicated the tenseness of his thoughts. "We have brains, Hal, and—er—well, if robbing criminals is crime, why not be criminals?" he finished.

"All of which means, I infer," I replied, "that you propose we forsake the path of law and order to pit our wits against the rich criminals—rob them?"

"Exactly."

"You have voiced my own thoughts and inclinations to a whisper, Terry."

We shook hands and discussed our plans.

Four hours later we, Terrance Garlock and Haldine Steadman, were men with a purpose—a criminal purpose. We were criminals.

And what a life of crime we led!

IT REQUIRED TIME, caution, patience and money to perfect our organization; but in one year from the day Terry and I turned our brains to crime, the "Black Hawks" met in the basement of Mother Maldrene's resort for our first business session.

Twenty-three of America's shrewdest criminals were present. Among them were four women, including Marie Galtier. Marie was a native of France, though she had chosen America as a field for her criminal operations.

Terry and I had experienced great difficulty in persuading her to become a member of our organization. Many were the human vultures and money fiends of America who had gone down to defeat under beautiful Marie's smiles.

The first meeting of the Black Hawks was devoted to the drafting of the oath of allegiance and the by-laws. Next came the election of officers and a general dis-

cussion of the gang's purpose. I was elected leader of the gang. Then came the administering of the oath to each member. No oath was ever more solemn or binding.

Each member of the gang was a specialist. There was Tony Zellerton, whose knowledge of safes of every description and his ability to open them was almost uncanny. Zip Brinton, New York's cleverest pickpocket, was with us. Sandy Dunnlund, whose reputation as a confidence man was the envy of many crooks, unhesitatingly took the oath. The noted Charles ("Doc") Hanks, ex-lawyer and detective, but now a super-criminal, enthusiastically lined up with us.

And Marie—beautiful Marie!—who had yet to find a sample of handwriting that she could not imitate perfectly; whose wonderful dark eyes had lured many a money leech to his financial doom; whose utterly clueless criminal operations had astounded a nation and completely baffled the police and detectives! Ah, yes, every member of the Black Hawks was an expert in his line—a criminal genius.

In two weeks every detail of organization was completed. No secret order in existence was more closely united; no organization of men and women was so intent on a common purpose.

Our first victim was Malcom Nisson, the near millionaire who had become wealthy through "legalized" crime. We spread our net carefully, twenty-three keen criminal brains against the brain of Nisson. Slowly, cautiously we gathered him in. In six months Malcolm Nisson was practically penniless. I have seen his ghost, the ghost of a suicide—*ugh!*

Next came Dixon Denner, the profiteering sugar king, whose indiscriminate and heartless machinations had been felt in every home in America. Although he was not entirely crushed, many thousands of his ill-gotten dollars went into the coffers of the Black Hawks.

Others fell hard under our subtle attacks, and we prospered exceedingly.

And through it all I loved Marie Galtier. I had loved her from the moment I looked into the liquid depths of her dark eyes, though as yet I feared to tell her of it. And, too, Terry loved her. The situation was becoming strained.

It was Terry, good, old chum Terry, who relieved it. We had never ceased to be roommates and pals.

"Pal of mine," he said one evening in his usual direct way, "you are hopelessly in love with Marie. Now don't try to dodge the issue," he went on hurredly, as I attempted to cut in. "You love Marie, but darn your old carcass, you don't love her a whit more than I do. Now here, Hal,"—he stood before me and placed his hands on my shoulders—"we must be rivals in love because we both love Marie; our rivalry in that respect is inevitable, irrevocable. But let's play the game square. If you win, I drop out gracefully, no matter how bitter the pill, and remain your pal. If I win will you do the same?"

"That proposition is characteristic of you, Terry," I replied, "and it has greatly relieved my mind. I certainly promise to play my cards in this little game of hearts as a gentleman and a pal should. If you win Marie, I remain your friend and chum. In fact, Terry, as much as I love Marie, I would give her up rather than lose your friendship."

I WON Marie.

What a race it was! Terry, though naturally glum over the outcome, smiled bravely and gave me the hand of friendship.

"I am glad for you, old man," he said, and I knew he spoke from his heart.

Marie and I waited patiently until all the gang were in the city before we were married. Then came the nuptial festivities in the rendezvous of the Black Hawks. We made our home in a sumptuous three-room suite at Mother Maldrene's.

Our landlady's house, though the home of some of America's most notorious criminals, was exclusive in that only real, aristocratic criminals were admitted. And, too, Mother Maldrene's power reached far into police circles. She purchased and paid well for protection.

Terry was always given a hearty welcome in our home and he conducted himself as merely an old friend of the family, though I knew his heart ached.

A year passed; a prosperous, strenuous year for the Black Hawks and not without its dark days. Big Bill Silwert, one of our best gunmen, had been killed in a running fight with operatives of the Bixler Detective Agency. Sam Alvers died in the same skirmish. Jesse Delmere, our witty little electrician and locksmith, was captured while in the performance of his duties on the famous Micheau art job. He died in prison. Zane Baldwin turned informer, but before he had done much damage he—well, he became a ghost.

It was while directing the activities of the Black Hawks on the Helwig Oil Company job that my troubles began. Being a materialist, I scoffed at hunches, forebodings and the like. Marie, who was as temperamental and superstitious as she was beautiful, implored me to give up the Helwig job.

"I feel, Hal," she persisted in telling me, "that all will not go well on this case."

She invariably used the word "case" instead of my more indelicate term, "job."

I patted her shoulder and laughed lightly.

"Why, little girl," I patiently assured her, "the gang has discussed every detail of the venture. Every possible flaw in the chain of our intended movements on the job has been considered minutely. It is very simple. I have volunteered to get the papers from the safe in the company's office. The gang will take care of the policeman on the beat and the watchman in the building, and any one else who happens to be near the place. Once we have the incriminating papers in our possession, we will force Helwig and his associates to refund at par every cent squeezed from fools all over the country. Then will come our five hundred thousand for silence. Don't worry, it will be an easy haul."

"Nevertheless, I have a—a—oh, a premonition that all is not well." She looked pleadingly into my eyes. "Why did you volunteer to get the papers from the safe, Hal? That's Tony Zellerton's work."

"Because," I answered, "Tony has taught me much about safes in the past year, and I feel that it is up to me to do some real work once."

How our plans miscarried and how I alone was captured is another story. Enough to say that the situation resolved itself into a question of the capture of the entire gang and I alone escaping, or I giving warning to the gang and thereby being captured alone.

MARIE—poor girl!—was the only member of the gang present at my trial, it having been previously agreed at the meetings of the Black Hawks that when a member was in the toils of the law the others should not endanger the organization by being present at his trial. Neither should they correspond with a member during his incarceration. Marie, however, was not known by the police and was granted permission by a majority of votes of the gang to attend my trial and correspond with me if I were convicted.

I was found guilty and sentenced to serve not less than ten years nor more than twenty years in the state prison. Marie, after being thoroughly searched

by the matron at the county jail, was permitted to visit me alone for fifteen minutes in my cell.

It was a heart-rending fifteen minutes. It was not Marie, the notorious female crook, who wept on my shoulder; it was Marie my heart-broken wife.

The promises and vows we made would fill a chapter, but at last the relentless hand of the law wrested her from me, and several hours later I was alone in a cell at the state prison.

Ah, those interminable days of monotony! Idleness, the horrible spectre that kills the spirit of prisoners, was my daily lot. Only the favored ones and short-termers were given work in that prison. Doing time!

My only relief from the awful drag was Marie's weekly letters. I counted the hours between them; I read them daily until another one came. For two years Marie's letters came every week. Then came intervals of two weeks, three weeks, sometimes a month between them. It was hell, and worse, when they ceased to come at all.

What was wrong? Had the Black Hawks disbanded? Or, worse still, had they been captured? I watched and expected daily to see some of the old gang's familiar faces in the large mess hall at the prison. They did not come.

Several months passed with no word from Marie. I was almost crazed with anxiety. Then, quite unexpectedly, something happened one quiet morning.

The warden was making his weekly tour of inspection through the buildings. He merely glanced into my cell as he passed down the gallery. A second later another figure darted past the cell door.

I recognized the second figure as Angelio Sigari, a life-termer, whose cell was next to mine and who was said to be mentally unbalanced. I caught the glint of steel in the Italian's hand as he flitted by the open door.

In an instant I was after him. I was not a second too soon. The unsuspecting warden had halted to look into a cell. Sigari was standing at the official's back, and in his upraised hand he clutched a case knife which had been whetted to a sharp point on the cement floor of his cell. Just as several guards shouted a tardy warning to the warden I struck Sigari on the jaw and he dropped unconscious, the knife falling from his hand to clatter on the cement corridor twenty feet below.

There was very little said. The warden merely took my name and told me to return to my cell. Guards carried the unconscious Italian away.

A week later I was called into the warden's office and informed that I had been pardoned by the governor and prison board.

It seemed a century—in reality it was two hours—before I was on a train and speeding back to the city. Free, Free! Free to return to Marie, the Black Hawks, Terry!

It was night when I arrived in the city. Several hours before arriving, however, I became extremely restless. What had happened during my time in prison? Marie's failure to write for several months before my release worried me. Had something terrible happened?

A sickening thought suddenly entered my mind: Was Marie, my Marie, dead? Her vows, her promises to me—surely, all was not well.

I hurried through the station and emerged upon one of the main thoroughfares of the city. I had walked only several blocks when I became vaguely conscious that I was being followed.

Turning abruptly into a side street, I walked a block, turned into an alley and waited. A moment later a man entered the alley and halted directly before me. Even in the semi-darkness I recognized him as Zip Brinton, the Black Hawks' clever pickpocket.

"How in the world did you get out of the pen so soon, Hal?" he asked, advancing and grasping my hand.

"Pardoned," I explained briefly. "Where is the gang? How are Terry and Marie? Hurry, Zip, I am worried half to death."

Zip dropped my hand and looked at me in surprise. "You haven't heard?" he asked sympathetically.

"I've heard nothing from Marie for several months."

Zip turned his head away and was silent for a full half minute.

"I don't know how things are with the gang right now," he finally said. "You see, I haven't been a member of the B. H. for the past two months."

"You—you quit them?" I demanded, half angrily.

"Yes, by request of the gang's present leader, Terry Garlock."

"Terry asked you to quit?"

"Not asked—demanded. Terry and I had some heated words. I told him what I thought of him for the dirty deal he handed you."

"Handed me?"

"Why, yes. Terry, you know, married Marie on the very day she was divorced from you."

MARIE divorced me!—married Terry!

The enormity of Zip's statement had struck me like a blow in the face.

Zip placed his arm about my shoulders. "Come with me, old man," he said gently. "You are all unstrung, and heaven knows you have been given a pretty rough deal. You need a bracer, then I'll tell you all about it."

Utterly crushed, I silently accompanied Zip through alleys and side streets, and in fifteen minutes I sprawled dejectedly in an easy chair in his room.

He produced some wine and glasses. My system, long free of alcohol, became fired as I gulped down several glasses of wine in quick succession. The stimulating affect of the liquor also brought with it a consuming rage, which, however, I successfully concealed from Zip.

I remained silent as he related all that had transpired with the Black Hawks during my absence. The gang, it appears, all but Zip, had accepted my downfall in Marie's heart and her acceptance of Terry as one of the many unfortunate vicissitudes peculiar to a temperamental woman. But—Terry a betrayer!

It was almost unbelievable. And Marie, the wife who wept on my shoulder and told me that every day away from me would be an eternity, false!

"Will you return to the Black Hawks now?" Zip asked.

"I don't know what to do, Zip," I answered wearily, though in reality I had already determined on a course of action.

"Better turn in and sleep over it," Zip suggested. "I have several prosperous-looking prospects on my list for tonight and may not return before morning. Make yourself comfortable here, old man. And remember, Hal, I'm your friend."

A moment later he was gone. I waited several minutes to allow him ample time to get out of the building, then I proceeded to business. I went through the dresser drawers, a suitcase, and finally found what I wanted in Zip's trunk—a revolver fully loaded.

Twenty minutes later I rang the front door bell at Mother Maldrene's place. The landlady herself came to the door.

"Why, Hal Steadman!" she exclaimed effusively. "Where—come in quick. Did you escape?"

"No; pardoned. Any of the gang here?"

"Yes, they are in session now in the basement. I'll go and tell them you are here. Sit down."

"No, wait, Mother," I hastily said. "I want to surprise them."

She accompanied me toward the stairway leading to the basement, firing all manner of interrogations and exclamations. Suddenly she halted and placed a detaining hand on my sleeve.

"You have heard about Marie and Terry?" she queried, giving me a close scrutiny.

"Yes, I have heard," I replied, simulating well a shrug of resignation. "I cannot blame them, I suppose."

My reply evidently satisfied her.

"Please let me go down alone," I requested.

"Sure," she agreed with a giggle. "And I'll bet they will be a some surprised bunch."

Very softly I descended to the basement door. I could hear voices beyond. I cautiously turned the knob and opened the door about two inches. The Black Hawks were all there except Zip Brinton and Marie.

I was disappointed in not seeing Marie in the room. She, I had determined, was to play an important part in the scene I had planned. Well, I would see her later; she would not escape me!

The gang was seated about a long table. Drinks were being served and toasts given, as per custom of the Black Hawks preceding the opening of a business discussion. Terry sat near the head of the table, but not in my accustomed place. My chair, the leader's chair, was not occupied.

Jimmy Delphrane rose.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, holding high a glass of wine, "Let's drink to the health of the comrade who unhesitatingly sacrificed his liberty that the Black Hawks might live on in freedom and plenty; to good old Hal Steadman, whose vacant chair there at the head of our board is a mute though eloquent symbol of his loyalty and devotion to the Black Hawks."

As Jimmy talked on I watched Terry, my one-time pal and friend. He had risen with the others, but his head hung and Jimmy's words were evidently cutting into his heart.

"Let's drink to Hal, mates," Jimmy went on. "May he return to us again—"

I threw the door wide open and strode into the room, revolver in hand. As one man, the Black Hawks turned and stared at me in speechless amazement.

"YOU SNEAK!" I hissed, leveling the revolver at Terry.

I felt my finger tighten on the trigger; I saw the hammer rise; I saw Terry make a quick movement toward his hip pocket. My revolver snapped—merely a sharp, metallic *click*.

I saw something flash in Terry's hand. A roar. I felt no pain. I remained in the same posture, arm extended toward Terry. But—

At my feet lay Hal Steadman, a lifeless mass of clay!

I was a ghost! Where a moment before I stood, a living, breathing man, with murder in my heart, was now an invisible shadow; only the mind, desires, passions, weaknesses—the personality—of Haldine Steadman.

I was instantly adapted to my present state, undazed, unwondering. It seemed natural and fitting, this sudden leap into eternity. As in my material existence I could see, hear; but it seemed all wrong that those old pals of mine should stare aghast at the huddled heap on the floor and utterly ignore *me*.

Several wine glasses fell from shaking hands to shatter on the floor and table. The women gasped. Anne Stitt fainted. I was watching Terry. His face had gone white; he looked down upon the body with eyes that were wide and staring.

The revolver fell from his hand and clattered on the floor. Slowly he walked over to the thing that had once been and knelt down before it.

"Hal," he whispered brokenly, "Speak to me, Hal! Please, old pal! Why, I didn't want to hurt you, Hal!"

As he spoke, a scene of long ago came before me. He and I, little kids, were throwing snowballs at each other. One of his white missiles struck me. Though I was not hurt, I threw myself face downward in the snow and pretended I was dead. He had done then as he did now, knelt down near me, and spoke the words he now spoke:

"Hal! Speak to me, Hal! *Please,* old pal! Why, I didn't want to hurt you, Hal!"

It was Terry, my old chum, and he was in distress.

"Hal, please forgive me," he pleaded.

"Why, of course I'll forgive you, Terry," I responded; but it was the voice of the dead—a ghost's voice that the living could not hear.

"Listen, Hal," Terry went on plaintively, as if he expected my huddled remains to listen, "I was weak, old man; I could not resist her. She asked me to marry her only after she had divorced you. I even begged her not to divorce you. And, oh, I loved her, Hal, and she tempted me. I am only human. Hal—Hal—" He covered his face with his hands and sobbed convulsively.

Others had gathered around, seeing me not, hearing me not, as I stood over Terry and endeavored vainly to comfort him.

"Come, Terry," said Doc Hanks, placing his hand on the young man's shoulder, "it was self defense pure and simple. Hal came here to kill you; and you killed him. Come on, you fellows." —turning to the others—"let's get the body out of the house. And remember, everybody, when the police find poor old Hal's body, we know nothing of his death. It will be a case of suicide."

I MUST see Marie. She was, I presumed, in her apartment.

Instantly I was upstairs and in the living-room of what was once my home. Where I wished to be I was there on the instant. I was a *mind*, nothing more.

There was no one in the room. I waited, sitting on the divan. Presently Terry entered, hair awry, face haggard and drawn. He sat down by my side on the divan, little knowing that I was there, and moaned in the anguish of a broken heart and a seared conscience.

Again I endeavored to tell him that I heard, I knew, I forgave, but it was no use. Again the door opened and Marie entered, beautiful as ever; more alluring even to me, a ghost, than ever.

"Why, Terry!" she exclaimed, halting abruptly just inside the door, "What in the world is the matter—"

Suddenly her face turned to a sickly gray color and into her eyes came an indescribable terror.

"Merciful Heaven!" she gasped. "Terry! *Terry!* There, *sitting at your side!* Terry, he has his arm on your shoulder! It is *Hal!* No, it is not Hal; Hal is dead! Oh, I know, I know; you have killed Hal! Terry!—"

She slipped to the floor unconscious.

Terry bounded from the divan and stood now looking down upon me—me, the ghost that could not be seen by him.

I wished to leave them! to get away from Terry's anguish. Instantly I was in the street, an invisible thing to drift—and wish.

Other ghosts, many of them, I saw as I drifted aimlessly on through unrecorded time. I gave little heed to those of my kind; neither did they heed me. We were a silent, ghostly horde, who would not allow the natural scheme of things to carry us away to better things—away from reality.

Perhaps it was a week, perhaps it was a year later that I again attended a meeting of the Black Hawks. Others of them had died, but they were present. It seemed fitting that I should sit in my old chair at the head of the table.

Big Bill Silwert, who died in the fight with the detectives, sat in his usual

place. Sam Alvers, another shadow, was in his old place at the table. Nearly all the *dead* members of the Black Hawks were there. Some of those who had passed on had wrested themselves from things material upon their death and never returned.

Detective Walter Bellden, who had been killed by Doc Hanks, leaned against the wall and watched proceedings with an amused expression on his astral face.

Terry, he of the living and he who had slain me, sat near me. But what a Terry! No longer the old-time cheering smile on his lips. His hair, once a dark brown and curly, was now thin and gray. I had been near him almost constantly since he killed me, but he would not see me, could not hear me. How I longed to tell him he was justified in what he did! How I longed to ease his stinging conscience!

Drinks were served. Terry nodded to Herman Damstead. Herman rose.

"Sister and brother Black Hawks," he began in his deep voice, holding high a glass of port, "shall we drink again tonight to the memory of Hal Steadman, our friend, our leader, who, though he alone was the cause of his death, is yet a friend and a Black Hawk in our memories? Would that he could sit in yonder chair again tonight and once more give us wise counsel. Ah, that we could only see him there again, smiling the old familiar smile, telling us again—*Gad!*"

The glass of port fell to the table, sending a shower of splintered glass over the white spread. The hand that held the glass now pointed directly at me.

"*It is he—Hal!*" Herman whispered hoarsely. "See, *see*, he is smiling up at me!"

Then I knew from the look of mingled surprise and terror on his face that I had faded from his vision. He remained in the same position, pointing a shaking finger at the chair.

Several of the men laughed nervously.

"Better go to bed, Herman," one of them advised. "This port plays the dickens sometimes with a man's imagination."

I noted, however, that every face in the room was pale. They led Herman, weak and trembling, from the room. I followed.

"I'm not drunk, boys," he protested huskily. "I saw him—*saw Hal!* He was smiling up at me. He sat in his chair as he used to sit in life, his legs crossed, his right elbow on the arm of the chair and his chin resting in the palm of his hand."

I left Mother Maldrene's again to drift, a bit of flotsam on a sea of discontent and regret. But I always drifted back to my old pal Terry.

Many strange things I saw. Ah, you mortals, what a world you live in! We ghosts know. We hear the promises that are made to be broken. We hear the vows of love made and see those vows shattered on the altar of greed and lust. And such was to be the lot of Terry.

Marie, whose heart and love was like the drifting sands of Sahara, or the changing monsoons of Eastern seas, was drifting away from Terry.

Doc Hanks it was who was successfully battering down the woman's weak fortresses of loyalty to her husband.

I was with Terry the night he returned to his home to find Marie gone. Pinned on the door on the inside was a sheet of writing paper, and written on the paper in a flourishing feminine hand was this:

"Terry: As you once won me from Hal, so has Doc Hanks won me from you. We will be far away when you read this. Please do not attempt to find us, because—well, I do not hate you, Terry, nor wish you harm, and Doc, you know, never allows any one to get the drop on him. Forget me, Terry, if you can.

"Marie"

I followed the heart-broken man from the house. I was at his side when he left the city. I was with him still when he at last wandered through the woods in the darkness of the night and finally stood with bared head on the banks of the old swimming pool, where years ago we told each other our boyhood troubles and gave each other our boyhood sympathy.

Why would not Terry see me? Others had seen me. Perhaps this night he would. Perhaps—

"Hal," he whispered, holding out his arms toward the pool. "Hal, what shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?"

I stood before him, peering, peering into his eyes. *Why* could he not see me?

Then he saw, and he, like the others who had seen me, became terrified.

"*Hal!*" he screamed. "For Heaven's sake, have mercy on me, old man! Yes, yes, I know I killed you, but I'm sorry, so sorry. Don't haunt me, Hal! Please go away!"

As he backed away from me, holding up his arms as if to ward off a blow, I followed, ever trying to make him understand.

Then—

He screamed, the terrifying scream of a stricken soul, and, even before the echoes died away in the distant wood, he plunged into the pool.

All was still then. The surface of the water became calm as a soul detached itself from a material body.

It rose to the surface, a nebulous glow that drifted to me across the water. Terry it was, understanding now and unafraid.

"Come, pal of mine," I said, and we floated away, hand in hand.

THE little old woman's voice falters now. She is awakening from the trance. Those two skeptics sneer still.

"Come, Terry, old pal, let's leave these things of materialism. Let's go!"

Lecturer Derides Material Theories of Evolution

DR. HENRY VAN DYKE, in a recent address in Chicago, declared "The mind of the materialist is sheer chaos, disturbed occasionally by lightning flashes which he calls thought." He added that there is no reason why evolution should be regarded solely as a material process, and then continued:

"It disturbs me to think of the number of honest, simple people who today are worried beyond reason by new-fangled and purely material theories of evolution, which deny the existence of a future world. Surely we can imagine evolution as successive efforts of our Creator, who improved again and again upon His work, until at last He produced His finest creation, man, and to him gave an immortal soul."

A Special Article About a Weird Cult

VOODOOISM

By WILL W. NELSON

WHEN the savage negroes of Africa were first introduced into America as slaves, they brought with them a strange, weird form of ceremony known only to the savage tribes of the African jungles. It was not a religion, but a form of sorcery called voodooism.

Voodooism found its strongest adherents among the negroes of the Southland. As the southern negroes became more educated and enlightened, voodooism vanished to a great extent, but there are still some sections of the South where the negroes believe in and practice this strange doctrine today, just as their ancestors did in the jungles of Africa centuries ago, except perhaps in a more modified form. In the large southern cities the voodoo doctor still plies his trade, prospering from the ill-gotten fees received from the ignorant and the wicked.

Nowadays voodooism is generally called "conjuring," by the negroes of the South. It is a common occurrence now to hear a negro say: "I'll sho get de conjure man atta dat nigger," when he feels he has been ill treated by one of his own race. Or, when a negro is suffering from some ailment, "Dat nigger has sho been conjured."

The quarters of the voodoo, or "conjure doctor," are usually located in the heart of the toughest negro section of a city, off the street and in some dark, dismal-looking alley. Here, under seclusion and out of reach of the law, he carries on his nefarious profession.

Some of his biggest fees come from the "fixing" of clandestine relations between the sexes; and some of his best customers are white men of high social standing aand wealth, whom the world does not suspect. Many of his patrons, too, are ignorant negroes of the slums, who pay good fees to have a "conjure" removed, or to have an enemy placed under the magic spell.

To gain access to the voodoo doctor's quarters is no easy matter. Before a stranger is allowed to cross the threshold, the man of supposed magic power must be convinced that the visitor will in no wise cause trouble with the law.

Admitted to this mystic place for the first time, you feel as though you had been suddenly transmitted to some weird, gruesome scene from Dante's Inferno. Seated in a large high chair on an elevated platform, like a king on his throne, you behold a big, black negro. His lips are of enormous proportion. His nose is prominent, with widely extended nostrils. His large eyes protrude from their sockets, and in the dimly-lighted room those eyes shine like coals of fire. He resembles some giant member of the ape family rather than a human being.

His garb is as strange looking as his countenance. On his head he wears a covering resembling a turban, while his body is shrouded with a peculiar-looking robe of varied colors. His speech, whether natural or affected, is most peculiar and difficult to understand.

On a table before the voodoo king, lies coiled a big hissing serpent. As you gaze at the snake a strange sensation seems to creep over you, and you wonder if the voodoo king has cast on you a spell. The serpent's tongue moves to and fro from its mouth, while its eyes shine with a mystic glow. You now realize that you are standing in the presence of a real voodoo king, who claims that he gets much of his magic power from the snake which lies before him.

Over the king's table there is suspended a large round piece of dried flesh. The king tells you this is a dried human heart, cut from the body of an enemy of voodooism while the person was yet alive. On the walls are suspended one or more human skeletons, while about the room are numerous large dried snakes, lizards, frogs and other reptiles.

There are jugs and bottles containing many strange and curious concoctions, "guaranteed" by the king to produce any desired effect. About the room are several divans and numerous curious-looking pillows made by hand. The floor is covered with numerous pieces of cloth of various shades of color, stitched together. A peculiar odor, perhaps from the dried reptiles and other objects in the room, permeates the air. On a table stands an old-fashioned oil lamp, casting a dim light and giving to the room a ghostly and weird appearance.

The voodoo king will tell you that he inherited his strange powers from a long line of African ancestors, and that through the serpent these powers are kept alive within his being. At his death his mystic powers will pass on to the body of some other negro man, or perhaps some negro woman.

The weird objects about the room are all used by the voodoo king in his calling. Each object is supposed to possess some specific charm. What is known as the "gris-gris," or "conjure bag," is made and sold by the voodoo king to many who are simple enough to believe in voodooism. The "gris-gris" is made of a number of broken twigs, bits of bone, pieces of horse hair, ground brick, a piece of the "human heart" and other things. When placed under the doorstep, or about the house, this bag is supposed to cause great evil to the occupants of the house. Whenever a negro finds a "gris-gris" about his house he loses no time in getting to the nearest voodoo doctor, to have the evil spell removed. The "gris-gris" is sold by the doctor for $2 each, or for as much as he thinks his customer will pay.

SOME TIME ago I secured entry, after considerable difficulty, to the quarters of a noted voodoo doctor in Mobile, now dead. He had made a fortune from his nefarious practice. His place was located just off St. Louis Street, at that time in the very heart of the underworld of that quaint old southern city. He was especially noted as a dealer in the "gris-gris" and was king of the voodoos in Mobile. It is said of him that the evil he did still lives after him. However, there are still many negroes who hold to the opinion that the greater part of his work was for the good of both whites and negroes.

Before the civil war voodoo meetings were held secretly by the negroes all over the South. But today the negroes are more enlightened, and for this reason but few of these meetings are now conducted. The present-day voodooism of the South is confined more to the practice of the voodoo doctor, or king, and is more in the form of fortune telling.

These voodoo meetings were always held in great secrecy, and late at night, during the dark moon. The place of meeting was usually on the borders of some dismal swamp, surrounded by a deep forest of gigantic trees. Here the conclave of negroes would gather, and, after divesting themselves of their clothing, they would gird their loins with red handkerchiefs, or something of the sort. A king and queen lead the conclave. They were distinguished from the others by something tied around their waist, usually a blue cord. The king and queen stood in one end of the room, and in front of them was a box containing a serpent. Before the ceremony, runners were sent out in every direction to make sure no person was in hearing distance. Assured of this, the ceremony of the adoration of the snake would commence. The king told the negroes gathered around him that they might have all confidence in the queen and himself, and asked them to tell what they most desired, and it should be given to them. In turn, each would stand in front of the king and queen and implore the voodoo god. Some would ask for freedom and wealth, some for the gift of domination over their master, some to be crowned with heaven's glory, some for more and better food and raiment.

Following this ceremony the king would lift the queen upon the magic box, containing the serpent. As soon as her feet touched the mystic box she became "possessed." Like another python, she quivered, while her entire body convulsed. She was supposed to be "inspired," and from her thick black lips the oracle would give out its edicts. On some she bestowed freedom from slavery, on others love and success and many other things to their liking; but, to a few, bitter invectives came from her lips in thundering tones. After all questions had been answered by the oracle, the members of the conclave formed in a circle, and within this circle the serpent was placed. Each member of the gathering would present an offering; each in turn would be assured by the king and queen that their offering was most acceptable to their divine protector—the serpent. Then an oath was administered, binding all to secrecy, and obligating all to assist in carrying out any work designated at any time.

Following the administering of the oath, the famous voodoo dance took place. The dance was usually held after an initiation into the ranks of voodooism. The king would draw a circle in the center of the room with a piece of charcoal. Within the circle the black neophyte stood, trembling with fear. Into the neophyte's hand the king placed a package containing powdered brick, pieces of bone, horsehair and other equally senseless things. Taking a piece of wood, the king would strike the neophyte gently on the top of the head, then commence singing an African song. The entire membership would join in the singing of the song, while the black neophyte danced until convulsed. He was then given liquor to revive him and taken to the altar, where the oath was administered to him, while he fell into an hysterical fit.

At the conclusion of this ceremony the king would place his hands upon the box containing the serpent, make peculiar movements of his body and communicate these movements to the queen, who conveyed the motion to every member present. Soon all commenced to shake their bodies, from their waist line to the top of their heads. The queen was more affected than any. Frequently she would visit the serpent to absorb a fresh supply of magic power. A large jug of liquor was then passed around, and all drank freely, until every member of the conclave was under the influence of drink. The negroes shouted, and their shouts grew louder and louder until pandemonium reigned. Many of the members fainted and almost choked, while they danced and shouted, spinning around on their feet, tearing the few remaining vestments from their bodies, some lacerating their flesh. Often many would dance and shout until they were deprived of reason, and fell in a faint.

Many voodoo kings and queens of the South became quite noted, and had many followers. Ignorant whites, and some not so ignorant, as well as most negroes, were believers in this strange doctrine and its powers for good and evil.

One of the most noted voodoo queens was Marie Laveau of New Orleans. Innumerable stories are told concerning her, and during her career her name was on the lips of practically every citizen of her native city. She sprang suddenly into prominence and fame. Where she came from, or who she was, no one seemed to know. Not long ago I visited the cathedral archives in quaint old New Orleans, where I had the privilege of delving into some musty old records, which threw the first light upon the heretofore clouded origin of that noted voodoo queen. In those records was registered the marriage of Marie Laveau to Jacques Paris, under the signature of the famed Pere Antoine. These records show the marriage ceremony took place, August 4, 1819, and refer to the bride and groom as, "both free people of color."

During the year 1826 Jacques Paris died. After his death his widow formed a liason with Christopher Glapin. To them several children were born. One daughter was named Marie, and, being of illegitimate birth, took the mother's maiden name—Marie Laveau. According to the records found in the cathedral archices, the date of the birth of Marie Laveau was February 2, 1827. From her birth until young womanhood, nothing was known of her. At the age of about 22 years she suddenly sprang into prominence as a dabbler in black magic. At that time she was living in a dilapidated cabin on Bayou St. John. Both whites and negroes visited her cabin in great numbers during those days, seeking advice concerning many matters of importance to them. She is still well remembered by many of the older people of New Orleans, and according to many white people her character was none too good, but members of her own race still have a strange veneration of her, perhaps thinking it safer not to cast aspersions upon the dead.

It is said of Marie Laveau that she was a woman of fine physique, of light complexion and straight black hair. Often she would introduce herself into some of the best white families of New Orleans as a hair dresser, and, while engaged in this work, would assist in clandestine correspondence between sweethearts and assist youths in their affairs of love. As queen of the voodoos, she is said to have carried out the ritual according to the original creed. To idolatry she is said to have added blasphemy. To her belongs the distinction of having first popularized voodooism in New Orleans by inviting members of the press, the sporting fraternity and others to the annual festivals held by the voodoos on St. John's eve (June 24), at some place not a great distance from Bayou St. John. She sold charms, and claimed to cure all manner of ailments, caused by the magic spell of the "gris-gris."

Notwithstanding the many stories of evil related concerning Marie Laveau, it is said of her that she was tender hearted, and that she performed many deeds of charity and kindness. It is stated that those in trouble or dire distress found in her a really true friend, and that she visited many prisoners in the jails in New Orleans, who had been condemned to death, taking them fruit and sweetmeats. One of these prisoners was Antonie Cambre, convicted of murder. She had access to this prisoner's cell, and on the eve of his execution she visited him. In the Creole dialect she is quoted as saying; "Mon petit, befo' you

(Continued on page 92)

A Strange Tale of the Mayan Snake Worshipers

SENORITA SERPENTE

By EARL WAYLAND BOWMAN

IT WILL BE SAID: "It is impossible; such a thing could not be!" Yet, it shall be told:

Cortesana Serrano, most beautiful, most alluring of all the ladies in the ranchito at Socorro, or for that matter throughout the whole of San Bendito, was also the "Senorita Serpente," and lovers who tasted her lips died quickly, or worse!

It is hard to believe.

But they who are skeptical know not of the mysteries that take place in the land of the Azteccas, where whispering voices, evil and good, come from the Llano Sonora at night; and in the darkness of the Sierra Negrito gorges there is enchantment.

Padre Algonza de Reya, the holy priest who cares for the Mission at Magdalena and has seen many things, both pleasant and terrible, saw three men, all strong in body, young and with souls when they went to the hacienda La Queratto, where Cortesana Serrano had enticed them; and when they came back they were creatures scarcely human or animal, writhing and hissing, unable to speak, making noises in their throats like Blunt Nose, the rattlesnake who lives under the Black Boulder among the cactus beds and the basalt boulders on the slope of San Miguel.

Padre Algonza saw, and Padre Algonza would not lie.

Besides that, there was the thing which happened to Skinny Rawlins, called by

the Mexicans "Senor" Skinny, the cowpuncher Americano, and the Ramblin' Kid, the other vaquero from Texas and who is known by his gentle manner of speech, the dark eyes, and who smiles always, even as he did when he mastered the "Senorita Serpente" (after shooting "Lobo," who was said to be the Yaqui and who watched) after Senor Skinny had already yielded and was helpless. They too, the Americanos, as well as Padre Algonza, knew it was so.

Who, then, shall say it was false?

Not only were those who went into the house La Queratto, the fine casa, the luxurious home of Cortesana Serrano—the "Senorita Serpente"—and which was hidden among trees behind the thick walls of the court by the rock-cliff at the edge of Canyon del Seco, loathsome in their movements and the look in their eyes when they came out (if ever they came out), but even their bodies were mottled like the skin of the gila monster, or Blunt Nose, the rattlesnake, and their flesh had the odor of the reptile.

It was horrible.

"They are accursed!" Padre Algonza declared. "The breath of 'Senorita Serpente'—she with the face of an Angel and the passion of a fiend—has been blown into their mouths! Their souls have been withered! No more are they men. *They are snakes!*"

Even so, no Senorita in all Socorro was so bewitching, so hard to resist, as was Cortesana Serrano, the "Senorita Serpente."

Men followed eagerly after Cortesana Serrano.

From where she came was not told—only this: it was from the South. Some said she was Aztecca, others said she was Tolteci—and all agreed that Cortesana Serrano was most beautiful and lived alone with the old watchman called "Lobo," said to be a Yaqui, at the casa La Queratto.

Wise men, even, sought Cortesana Serrano and died—or went mad— in the embrace of the "Senorita Serpente!"

First, there was Francisco Trevino; he came from Mazapata—very handsome—a captain with the soldiers of Comandante Garcia. From the moment he saw the "Senorita Serpente," smiling from the doorway of the dance place kept by the big one, she who smokes mirrihuana, and is called "Old Bonanza," Captain Trevino was under the spell. That night they went to the casa La Queratto. Pietro Gonzales, who tends the goatherds of Don Alvardo, saw them go in.

For two days after that neither "Senorita Serpente" or Captain Trevino were seen. What happened in the house behind the high walls has not been said, but there were sounds—like the wind in the dry branches of a yucca that is dead, or the noises that come from the small caves under the basalt cliff where many snakes are known to have dens.

The third day Captain Trevino was found, half way between the casa La Queratto and the cantina El Merino—crawling on his stomach in the dirt of the road! He could not speak, he could not stand, he could only squirm in the dust with the undulating motion of the reptile. From his throat there came hissing, and his face and body were spotted like Blunt Nose, and his flesh had the smell of the serpent.

That night he died.

PADRE ALGONZA tried hard, but could get from Captain Trevino no look of undertanding, nor a word to tell what had been done.

"Senorita Serpente," that night also, came again to the ranchito in Socorro; her black eyes were brighter, her red lips were warmer, her dancing more sinuous and inviting, and her laughter more seductive than ever!

Two there were then who did not come back.

One, a Gringo—his hair was the color of straw—came to San Bendito because of the mines and was going, next day, to Los Oro, where the copper ledges are worked; instead, that night with "Senorita Serpente," he went to the casa La Queratto. Never again was he seen.

The second night "Senorita Serpente" once more was at the fandango at Old Bonanza's.

Then it was Manuel Valencia, son of Don Julio, very rich. Manuel danced three times with "Senorita Serpente" in Old Bonanza's after which the two left together.

Two days later Manuel was discovered crouching against the wall of the cantina El Merino, his head swaying from side to side like a snake that is watching to strike. From his throat came the hissing, his face was blotched and hideous, his eyes were the eyes of a demon, and the odor from his mouth was the odor of the gila monster—the reptile diablo.

Padre Algonza worked all day and part of the night, but could not save the son of Don Julio.

Again "Senorita Serpente," who had been gone for two days and two nights, appeared, more fascinating than ever, at the ranchito in Socorro—yet, in her eyes at times there was a look that could not be understood. It was a mingling of recklessness, of horror, of dread.

AFTER ONE NIGHT at the casa La Queratto, Jose Santoyez, brother of Pablo, was found trying to hide under the bench by the great palm at the corner of the fonda. His head only was sticking out, and when anyone came near he hissed at them like the poison viper, and he also was mottled and smelled the same as the others—as does a venomous serpent.

Pablo, with the help of Padre Algonza, got Jose in a box and sent him to Hermorillo, and to this day he is there, in the place where they keep those that are mad—still acting as he did when they found him.

"Senorita Serpente" came after that to Old Bonanza's, and though she laughed and danced and her charms were greater, if anything, than before, it could be seen in her soul was a weight—a sadness she dared not make known.

Senor Skinny and th' Ramblin' Kid came then to Socorro.

There was to be the Celebration Porfiro. A great time was to be held. For one thing, there was the bull-fight. Stebano Venustanio, bravest matador in all San Bendito, was to kill the black bull, "El Toro Satan" they called him, because already he had gored several horses and was famous for the sharpness of his horns and the wicked manner of his fighting.

Coming from the Rancho del Crazy Snake, where they guarded the cattle, th' Ramblin' Kid warned Senor Skinny:

"It is not necessary always for a man to be th' fool—" th' Ramblin' Kid, sitting on the little roan stallion, told Senor Skinny, "—on this trip—leave th' senoritas alone!"

Senor Skinny laughed.

"If a cowpuncher can't fall in love once in a while," he answered, lightly, "wat the hell is the use of bein' alive!"

"If a cowpuncher does, as you say, 'fall in love once in a while'—under certain conditions—" th' Ramblin' Kid replied significantly, "—especially in th' country we're goin' to now—"

"Don't be so darned mysterious!" Senor Skinny cried gaily, "love is love wherever it happens—"

"—he won't be alive!" th' Ramblin' Kid finished.

Senor Skinny looked superior tolerance at his slender, dark-eyed companion. Once more Senor Skinny laughed, very joyously, and, as was his habit when thinking of the ladies, he broke into song:

"Oh, the bussards watch th' carcass—
While the coyotes whine an' yell;
But Old Skinny loves a Moiden—
And he'll follow her to hell!"

"'To hell' is truer than you think—" th' Ramblin' Kid said, seriously. "You do not know San Bentito! There are things—"

"There ain't any of them worryin' me!"

"A fool is a fool," th' Ramblin' Kid muttered pityingly.

"Senorita Serpente," that night, was in Old Bonanza's when th' Ramblin' Kid and Senor Skinny came in. Senor Skinny looked once at her—and was ready, if need be, to kill the handsome Matador Stebano, who at the instant was holding the hand of the "Senorita Serpente."

Slowly, carelessly, the eyes of th' Ramblin' Kid also lifted to the eyes of "Senorita Serpente." Suddenly his body grew tense. His look became a searching scrutiny. Recognition flashed across his face:

"Serrano! Daughter of the Snake!" he exclaimed under his breath.

"Senorita Serpente's" gaze wavered, her form trembled; quickly, with a gasping cry, she turned her head away.

At Senor Skinny the "Senorita Serpente" smiled.

Again, as if unwilling, but unable to resist, she looked at th' Ramblin' Kid; in his black eyes was something that made the color drain from her cheeks, and once more "Senorita Serpente" shuddered—even while she threw back her head and laughed daringly, defiantly, and with a subtle lift of her brows invited Senor Skinny to come to her side.

"GAWD!" Senor Skinny murmured to th' Ramblin' Kid. "Did you see that? Did you see her eyes?"

"I saw her eyes," th' Ramblin' Kid answered, a queer gentleness in his voice, "and I saw in them that which you didn't see—which you *couldn't* see, you poor damned fool!"

"Oh, well, everybody can't see what you see," Senor Skinny bantered, a bit scornfully, "When they were little they didn't get nursed, like you did, in the arms of the "Wise One" of the Toltec—"

At the reference to his orphaned boyhood among the Mozos los Sierras—"Men of the Mountains"—far to the south in the land of the Tolteci, before he wandered north into Texas, th' Ramblin' Kid's eyes narrowed, grew hard. Then his look softened; it was pity.

"Fool!" was his only reply.

Matador Stebano, very attractive in the brightly-colored green and yellow uniform of his calling, slender and graceful, with the red sash about his waist, scowled as Senor Skinny approached.

"The Senorita will dance with the Americano cowpuncher!" Senor Skinny smilingly reached for the small warm hand.

"Tomorrow—I kill—" Matador Stebano snarled.

"The bull!" Senor Skinny laughed derisively, as he led the "Senorita Serpente" away.

"Who is he—the dark-eyed one—he that plays at the monte?" "Senorita Serpente" breathed eagerly to Senor Skinny, her body close against his breast in the dance. "His look—it—it fills me with—with dread! His eyes—they seem to—to—*know!*" The last word was almost a gasp.

Senor Skinny glanced indifferently toward th' Ramblin' Kid, seated already at the table where they gamble with the cards—

"That's just th' Ramblin' Kid," "Senor" Skinny replied lightly—"a good old scout, in some ways, but not dangerous! He ain't much for the ladies. He don't understand 'em like I do, for instance!"

"He does not care for the senoritas?"

"Not so you could notice it—"

"Does he fear?"

"Nothin' on earth or in hell! He lived too long with the Toltec—"

"*Tolteci!*" The syllables leaped from the lips of "Senorita Serpente" like the hiss of a snake; she swayed, her hands convulsively clutched the arms of Senor Skinny; she reeled as if she would fall; her body became almost liquid in its limpness, in her eyes was terror—

"*Tolteci—*" "Senorita Serpente" repeated pantingly, as if frightened, "—the White One—Son of the Flame—without fear; without desire!"

Then she laughed. Such a laugh! Blending maddest of passion, wildest exultation, utterly hopeless despair.

After that "Senorita Serpente" danced, as never woman danced before—or since—in Old Bonanza's, in the ranchito, at Socorro.

PADRE ALGONZA brought the word.

Because of the bad sickness of the small child of Mateo and Nanita Sandoza, Padre Algonza came back very late, when the moon was going down, and rested almost on the top of Capaline, the volcano that is dead; at the entrance of the hacienda La Queratto, he saw "Senorita Serpente" and Senor Skinny pause for a moment; from behind the walls there was a rustling—like creatures gliding through the grass—the gate swung open, Senor Skinny and "Senorita Serpente" stepped inside of the place and again it was closed.

Padre Algonza did not wait.

As fast as he could, he hurried to the ranchito to find the other Americano cowpuncher, th' Ramblin' Kid. In Old Bonanza's he was still at the monte—

"Quick!" Padre Algonza whispered. "Senor Skinny has yielded! At the casa La Queratto—with the 'Senorita Serpente'—she whose kiss is the death—or madness. I saw them go in! What can be done?"

"Th' damned idiot." Slowly, th' Ramblin' Kid got up from the table, "I will go!"

"And I?" Padre Algonza questioned.

"Come also. From the outside you can watch!"

The casa La Queratto was black; the great gate was closed tightly and barred; from within was no sound save at times the swishing noise, as though something brushed swiftly past shrubbery heavy and dense.

"Your hand, Padre Algonza!" Very low th' Ramblin' Kid spoke.

Padre Algonza's hand was held down, th' Ramblin' Kid's foot rested in it—with a leap he caught the top of the wall, swung up and dropped to the ground inside of the court.

Th' Ramblin' Kid stepped to the gate, quietly lifted the bar, threw open the entrance.

"Stand here. Do not come in—unless—"

Padre Algonza stood at the opening. Inside it was dark; from the shadows there came such hissing as never before had the holy priest heard; the thick, sickening odor of venomous serpents filled the air; Padre Algonza made the sign of the Cross and shuddered.

Th' Ramblin' Kid, stooping forward, ran quickly to the door of the casa. It was open. A thin stream of red light poured from the room; at the door Padre Algonza saw th' Ramblin' Kid pause for an instant. Then he stepped inside—

There was silence, save for the hissing, hissing, that came from every part of the court, silence and the fearful nauseating smell of reptiles.

"The place is bewitched—it is accursed—it is the abode of the brood of the Evil One!" Padre Algonza whispered.

It seemed an age. Padre Algonza could not remember. He waited.

Then, holding the Crucifix before him, Padre Algonza himself went cautiously to the door.

That which he saw he cannot forget.

A SINGLE BURNER hung from a beam in the center of the room. Under it was the great copper shield of Zachu, "Lord of the Reptiles." A dull glow—red, as from smoldering embers—filled the place.

On a couch, covered with the skin of the spotted leopardo, at the far end of the room, was Senor Skinny wrapped in the slimy folds of a monster serpent, its head drawn back, the neck arched, jaws wide apart and reaching toward the parted lips of Senor Skinny, who stared with entranced vision, unable to move, into the fiendish eyes that to him seemed to be the caressing, inviting eyes of "Senorita Serpente" burning with love!

Crouched at the other end of the room was th' Ramblin' Kid—his will battling with the demon will of another great snake coiled before him and that blocked his way to the couch on which Senor Skinny was lying; the frightful head was reared, ready to strike—swaying from side to side—held back only by the look in the eyes of th' Ramblin' Kid—

Padre Algonza could not move, scarcely could he breathe.

The venomous mouth of the great snake bending above Senor Skinny was lowered slowly, surely, toward the face of the cowpuncher Americano. Another heart-beat, and the slimy gums would be glued to his lips and the soul be drained from his body—

"Serrano!"

The word whipped from the tongue of th' Ramblin' Kid like the stab of a dagger.

"Serrano—Daughter of the Snake!"

There was irresistible command in the tone. The thick folds about Senor Skinny trembled, the ugly, terrifying, head was turned toward th' Ramblin' Kid—in the eyes was all the fury and madness of passion arrested, and, with the look, a terror unspeakable.

"Serrano!"

Again, not loudly, but to be obeyed, came the word from the smiling lips of th' Ramblin' Kid.

At the interruption, rage tore at the monster serpent coiled and barring the path of th' Ramblin' Kid to Senor Skinny and the snake that held him enthralled on the couch—the ugly wedge-shaped head was drawn back—back—that the fangs might leap with the sureness of death into the flesh of the slim young Americano before it.

For the first time, th' Ramblin' Kid's hand flashed to the gun at his hip—

"Serrano—that you may live—Zacaratta, the Aztecca, your *malvado aliento*—must die!"

As th' Ramblin' Kid spoke, the gun crashed.

The great snake before him lashed wildly, futilely, about on the floor. A hazelike smoke for a moment enveloped it. The overwhelming fumes that come from the gila monster, the reptile diablo, when it is dying, filled the room. The six-foot length of the serpent shuddered convulsively and grew quiet—

And "Lobo," the Yaqui, lay dead, with a bullet in his brain!

"It was the snake—I swear it—th' Ramblin' Kid shot," Padre Algonza afterwards declared, and Padre Algonza would not lie. "Yet, it was 'Lobo,' the Yaqui—that died!"

Even the roar of the gun did not break the spell that held Senor Skinny—his mouth open, parted in an idiotic grin, still eagerly reaching for the touch of the hideous serpent-jaws bending toward him.

Breathless, Padre Algonza watched.

Th' Ramblin' Kid stepped forward, over the body of "Lobo"—quickly went to the couch—

"Serrano—your Master!" tenderly, almost as a lover speaks, the words came from his lips, smiling, gently, sadly.

"—Without fear—"

The open hand of th' Ramblin' Kid shot out and slapped the dripping mouth of the serpent.

"—Without desire—"

Again the hand crashed against the ugly head, and with a laugh—not of mirth, not of anger, not of passion—th' Ramblin' Kid turned away!

The sinuous coils tightened convulsively, then loosened, the head drooped, a haze like that which had enshrouded the other covered the forms on the couch—Senor Skinny and the reptile—and out of the mist came suddenly the agonized scream of a woman, filled with torture, and "Senorita Serpente," the Cortesana Serrano, stood up—swayed—and fell sobbing and moaning to the floor! Her lips were bruised as if they had been struck and blood was at the side of her mouth.

The great serpent was gone!

Senor Skinny, dazed, his eyes staring wildly about, started dizzily up from the couch.

"Where in hell—what's happened?"

"Leave quickly!" Padre Algonza commanded.

Th' Ramblin' Kid paused at the door.

On her knees, her body rocking back and forth, her hands clasping the Crucifix that hung from Padre Algonza's girdle, "Senorita Serpente"—Cortesana Serrano—piteously called:

"Tolteci! Tolteci—my own! Son of the Flame—the White One!"

Th' Ramblin' Kid stepped to her side, looked tenderly down into the upturned tear-drenched eyes; a smile of infinite sadness trembled on his lips as he whispered:

"Not yet, Serrano! Not yet. . ."

THAT NIGHT, not waiting for the dawn, th' Ramblin' Kid and Senor Skinny rode to the North.

The body of "Lobo" Padre Algonza left where it lay; "Senorita Serpente," the Cortesana Serrano, he took to the Mission at Magdalena. Never again did "Senorita Serpente" dance in the ranchito at Socorro, nor from that day has any person gone into the casa La Queratto.

In the afterglow, when the sun has dipped beyond the wild crags of Del Christo range, and darkness is over the Llano Sonora, "Senorita Serpente" slips out from the Mission and by the giant yucca stands and looks hungrily—her eyes no longer burning with the passion that lured men to the casa La Queratto, but instead glowing with the soft luster of undying love—toward the White Star that hangs over the top of Sentinel Mountain, far to the North.

There Padre Algonza found her the night after the Fiesta of the Penitentes.

"Padre Algonza—" "Senorita Serpente's" lips quivered with a smile, heart-tearing in its wistfulness, "Will He come? Will Tolteci—my Own—the White one—Son of the Flame—come again to Serrano?"

The answer brought hope to the upturned eyes—

"He will come, Daughter of Sorrow—" the arms of the priest drew the head of the girl to his breast, "—Tolteci, your Own, will come when your Soul—having been proved—can meet Him—"

Padre Algonza paused, the last words were a whisper—

"—Without fear; without desire!"

A Terrifying Ghost Story

The Room in the Tower

By **D. L. RADWAY**

NOT LONG AGO, I was stopping at an old castle in the northern part of Scotland—that land of mystic-minded people—and a certain tower in this castle, somewhat older than the other portions of the building, had for centuries been known by both the inmates and the villagers to be inhabited by ghosts.

There was an old tapestried room in this tower which had not been touched or slept in within the memory of the place. However, my love of and interest in the supernatural was so strongly implanted in my nature that I implored my hostess, Lady Garvent, to allow me to sleep in this ancient tapestried room for one night at least. Accordingly, the valet transferred my baggage, shortly after my arrival that afternoon, to the apartment in the tower.

It was a typical Scottish winter's night, the rain coming in driven gusts against the panes, with a howling wind with a scream in it like the voice of some unhappy Banshee, and occasionally a storm of sleet driving against the windows like the rattle of artillery. Round the big fire of logs in the hall we gathered cosily, the more content to be ensconced warmly indoors for hearing the war of the elements without.

My hostess expressed herself as only too pleased to be able to give me a night in the company of the family ghosts,

who had, happily, always confined themselves strictly to the room in the tower. The conversation drifted to the weird and the supernatural, and we all started to recount ghost stories that had come

within our knowledge or that of our immediate friends.

I candidly confess that in a short space of time the members of the house-party had got me into a thoroughly "jumpy" state of nerves, and I felt that really in such a place "anything might happen."

Then, at last, my hostess said, "I think it is time for us to put an end to this delightful conversation," and in saying "good-night" she added:

"I really do feel that I have, as it were, been communing tonight with spirits of another world than this. It is almost uncanny."

Everyone was a little inclined, I thought, to joke at my expense when they realized that I seriously meant to spend my night in the "haunted room," and I was laughingly escorted by the entire house-party to the worn stone staircase leading to the tower in the northwest corner of the castle. We said "good-night," and I mounted to my room.

It was furnished with the weirdest and most gruesome-looking black oak furniture it is possible to imagine, and a huge four-poster bed occupied the center of one wall and jutted well out into the room. My own "home comforts" were there—supplied by the thoughtful care of my man-servant—but there also, on the walls above the mantelpiece and above my bed, were the uncanny weapons of a bygone generation of Scotsmen. Pieces of armor of beautiful and intricate design—doubtless of Spanish workmanship—were propped against the walls; and in one corner, with most uncomfortable effect, stood a suit of armor.

The room in this square tower was very large. Never had I seen anything like the fireplace; so enormous was the chimney that one could almost stand upright within it, the hearth of bricks being on a level with the floor of the room. As my kind hostess had insisted on a large fire being lit on this wintry night, it was piled up with huge logs, and the room was lit up by the weird and flickering lights that come from burning wood.

The only other illumination was from four large candles, two on the dressing-table and two on the high mantelpiece. The mullioned windows, sunk deeply into walls over six feet thick, were heavily curtained with dark red velvet.

Not until a door had slammed—shot to by a fiercer gust of wind than usual, which seemed to shake the very tower to its foundations—and the deeply-glowing logs fell apart with terrible and startling suddenness at the same moment, did I realize that I was indeed shut out from all this ordinary world.

Intensely then did I realize that I was alone, and about to enter here into the life of the unreal, the occult—which up till now had been so fascinating merely to hear about. What would the experience be like at first hand? Always supposing that the spirits of the tower would reveal themselves!

The sides of this great room were hung with magnificent old tapestry, portraying scenes of the chase and the figures of huntsmen in their woodland costume, and hounds among the trees of a vast forest. It was a beautiful piece of needlework, and at another time it would have interested me greatly; but somehow, on this particular night, imagination had so played upon the chords of my mind that they jangled out of tune—so that to my fancy it seemed as though the eyes of the pictured horsemen really moved and followed my movements round the ancient room. On this wild night the draft behind the tapestry caused it to sway slightly in all its length, from time to time, and then the beings embroidered upon it seemed to dance and sway with it.

To the accompaniment of the shrieking wind and cruel blast outside, and the loud rattling of the panes as furious gusts of rain and sleet were forced against them, I undressed quickly, preparing for the night with a sort of quivering hurry to be done with it and into bed, very foreign to my nature. And after I was between the sheets I was actually coward enough not to wish to blow out the only candle that I had left burning!

In another moment, strange as it may seem, I swear that I heard a sigh of human breath close to my head—so strong that in a flash the candle on the small table by my bed's head was extinguished, and I was left holding my very breath in the semi-darkness, with only the flickering lights and shadows from the old logs crackling and spitting in the vast old fireplace.

There I lay, determined not to close my eyes for a moment—for I felt through all my being that weird events were near at hand. However, soon a sort of drowsiness, against which I was powerless to fight, overcame me, and I seemed, in a vision as it were, to see how a curtain, at the extreme end of the room, was blown slightly but unmistakably on one side by some invisible means.

This drowsiness now overcame me more and more, in spite of the growing horror of the night, and I must have dropped off into unconsciousness.

WHEN I AWOKE it was with a sensation that I can never forget while life lasts, of creepy chills that passed from the back of my neck up and down my spine, producing the most horrible feeling of shivering chilliness throughout my entire body. It is beyond the power of words to describe what I felt at that moment.

In another minute—when I found myself fully awake again—to my amazement and horror I saw by the light of the still faintly glowing logs on the hearth, crouching down in an indescribable heap round that great fireplace, a large and shapeless mass, covered apparently by a dingy white sheet, the dinginess of muslin yellow with age.

As I gazed—lying still and motionless upon my bed—I saw that thing move with an undulating motion, and I discovered that they were separate beings lying there, all enveloped in yellowish-white draperies of quaint and, to my eyes, unaccustomed material. Perhaps, centuries ago, when in real life it had been worn, it was white; but now it was musty and yellow with the passing of the years.

I gazed as if in a trance—and yet I know that I was fully awake. While paralyzed with horror, I felt every nerve in my body was pitched to its highest point of tension—waiting and watching eagerly to see what these beings round the fire were about to do.

One moment, and to my horror the central form began to move—slowly, slowly, with a strange "wavy" movement of arms and draperies quite impossible to describe, turning toward the bed on which I lay; and the next thing that caught my eye and held me transfixed was a long tangled lock of white hair that reached to the floor as the figure moved to its feet.

And as it turned, the face revealed to me—merciful heavens!—instead of a face, a grinning skull! And on the other side of the skull, too, was a long stream of white hair which reached to the floor.

The great hollows of the eyes of the death's-head seemed all at once to discover that a human being lay in the bed—and to smile repulsively. As I looked, all power to speak or cry for assistance, or move or turn, had gone from me. I lay there, frozen to the mattress by the sight.

This awful figure raised one arm to push back its robe; I saw the hand extended—but the flesh of that hand had left those bones years before. In its skeleton fingers it held aloft to me a smoking goblet—gliding swiftly now toward the bed.

(Continued on page 92)

Another Grim Tale by Vincent Starrett

Riders in the Dark

OPPOSITE the name of Robert Hamelin had been placed the red symbol of death.

Although it was Locklear's turn, I myself contributed the crimson drop, for Locklear's wound still kept him between the sheets, and already he was sufficiently exsanguined. His stertorous breathing came to us in little gusts from the inner room as we bent above the document of justice; with sinister accuracy, the sound punctuated our accusing sentences as Ridenour read them from the paper.

The sentence passed upon Hamelin was just. There had been no dispute; we were not accustomed to debate our motives nor explain our deeds. And in the index before us, from which we had chosen the name of Robert Hamelin, there appeared no other name but which, with equal justice, might have been selected.

"Tonight, then?" I asked.

"Tonight," replied Flood, soberly. "We have always been prompt. Why do you ask, Stormont?"

Sardis laughed offensively. "Hamelin has a beautiful wife," he sneered.

Flood turned on him in a cold fury.

"There are to be no more such remarks," said the captain, "this evening or any other evening. While I am your leader you will address one another openly and with complete respect. Whatever your private grievances may be, you will not bring them into this house. If your information is of such import as to merit our collective attention, a means is provided in committee."

Before his icy anger, Sardis shrank away; but I only laughed.

"My dear Sardis," I said, "were the motive you would seem to impute to me true, would I not be the first to welcome immediate action?"

At this Flood smiled, and the tense moment passed. Yet I was glad there had been no occasion directly to reply to the captain's question. Truth to tell, there was no assignable reason for my apparent hesitation; the emotion which had dictated my own query was at the moment beyond analysis.

Bereft of its sneer, Sardis's observation was a mere statement of fact. Hamelin *did* have a wife, but what was that to me? Although reports of her beauty had filled the countryside at the time of her arrival, a year previous to our condemnation of Hamelin, I had never seen her. Had Sardis? I could not help but wonder.

Sardis I hated cordially on general principles; he wore the aspect of a Judas; but his jealousy puzzled me. Was it because of my lieutenancy in the Brotherhood, or this woman?

Remotely, I suppose, I had thought of her, or had been influenced by the subconscious knowledge of her existence. It is true that I had wondered what she—young and lovely, according to gossip—could find to love in Robert Hamelin, the musty and middle-aged lawyer; but that thought had passed. It was no affair of mine, and in those days I had a grand passion for minding my own business. I had been with Flood scarcely six months, in spite of my position at his elbow.

The night was forbidding enough, black as the devil's riding boots, and shot at intervals with far, weird fire, although no rain fell. At the rendezvous our dozen met in silence save for the low trample of the horses' hoofs on the soft earth.

Sardis was the last to arrive. On his coming, a low word of command was given, and we moved out of the grove of young trees into the road. A mile beyond lay the denser tangle of the forest, and, beyond that, rose the mountains, dim and vast in the distorting exaggeration of darkness. Over the scene, with little respites of darkness, played the mysterious fire of the skies, and once in the distance I caught the low mutter of thunder in the hills.

In the wood we walked our horses, threading the maze in silence as deep as our thoughts, although at the moment there was no great need for secrecy. Taciturnity had been our rule for so long, however, that speech would have affected us much as a profanation of our ideals. Therefore, riding in my position at the rear, I was surprised when there came back to me on the light breeze a crisp command.

"Ride beside me, Stormont," ordered Flood, and I pressed forward to his side.

For a time no more was said. We rode close together, and often our knees touched as simultaneously the horses swung inward. Behind us, much in the same order, rose and fell the fantastic procession of our associates. The accidental jingle of a stirrup iron or the clink of rifle against buckle was exaggerated tenfold in the stillness; the stumbling of a horse seemed heavy with portent.

The captain leaned toward me and spoke in a low tone:

"There was nothing in what Sardis said this evening?"

"Nothing, Captain!" I responded. "I have never seen the woman."

He pressed my knee with his disengaged hand.

"I trust you thoroughly, Stormont," he said. "Be prepared to ride forward as scout when we have crossed the mountains."

There was no further speech during the journey, but the lightning wrote amazing messages across the sky. And in the mountains the night was as cold and black as the somber valley of a dream.

The house toward which we were riding was set upon a small hillside, and in daylight was visible from the last ridge of the final mountain. Instinctively, as we reached the crest, we checked our horses and looked down and across the interval to the foothills.

The distance was not great, and at once we saw the pinpoint of light which marked the dwelling. Flood and Sardis exclaimed in surprise. The hour now was late, and in this country the scattered citizenry retired early to their chambers.

"This may prove awkward," observed Flood thoughtfully. "If he has a visitor there may be complications."

He swung in the saddle with quick decision.

"Ride forward at once, Stormont, and reconnoiter. We shall follow slowly and halt in the ravine. Return as quickly as possible."

I pricked my horse gently and began the descent, then, reaching the flat, set out on a slow canter for the opposite hillside.

A curious change had taken place in me. Whereas in the forest and in the mountains premonitions of evil had troubled me, now, in the exhilaration of active service, I was again the daring avenger. The warning sky no longer crushed me with its weight; its hieroglyphics were only futile lightning

flashes. As I swept across the valley a high elation perched beside me in the saddle.

Then, as I neared the rise, I loosened my carbine and reined in the horse until he seemed to walk on tiptoe.

THE HOUSE now was plainly visible; a solid stone building facing the climbing road.

The rooms behind the portico were in darkness, but from a side window on the lower floor still shone the single square of light that we had seen from the mountain. A veranda running back and partly around the house from the front afforded an open road to the window and whatever lay behind its illumination.

I walked my horse forward in shadow until I was almost beneath the veranda and in the shelter of a great tree. Then I dismounted and climbed the railing to the porch. A moment later I had cautiously adventured my head around a corner of the window frame.

Robert Hamelin sat before a wide table on which were scattered books and papers in a noble profusion. He was writing rapidly and in silence save for the scratching of his pen, which came to me faintly through the glass curtain. A calm, studious face, intelligent but weak, beneath a tangle of gray-black hair.

His hand was firm as it traveled swiftly over the paper; no adumbration of doom had occurred to shake those fingers or haunt the room with fear. He wrote without pause and with exquisite ease, and I wondered what task kept him until this hour in his study.

Apparently he had no visitor, but an influence, of whose working I had been unconscious, now drew my eyes away, and I saw—*her*.

I shall not attempt to describe her, save to say that no report of her beauty that I had heard had been adequate. And her dark perfection was rendered the more incredible that it was found in this prison of books and legal papers.

Yet she lived and breathed in these surroundings as triumphantly young as when she had left her own civilization to dwell in this bleak district of blood and hate; and if her face were any mirror, her mind and heart were alight with thoughts that never had been mine. Tall she must be, I assumed, and lithe and powerful for a woman; but her face as she sat beside—. Well, I have said I would not attempt description.

Her eyes, at least, were for the man who bent in complete absorption above his papers. In them I read a devotion beyond limit, a depth of love that asked nothing in return; and in that understanding I experienced a happiness and a bitterness that wrung my heart. For I knew now that I had loved her always, and that she would never be mine.

As I watched, she rose and turned as if to leave the room. Despairingly, I leaned forward to follow her movement, and my impetuosity betrayed my presence. Her quick glance sought the window, and my face pressed against it turned her own white. A low cry must have left her lips, for Hamelin's glance followed hers, and in an instant he was on his feet, trembling. Then, with a bound, she had sprung for the window.

What her intention was I can not say. I did not stop to see, but sprang over the low rail and into the saddle. In another moment I was in full gallop across the valley, for the shock had cleared my wits and I knew that we were discovered.

I doubted if the respite would save Hamelin, but my duty was clear. I must report the situation at once. When I looked back over my shoulder the light in the window had disappeared. The house was in blackness.

I had no difficulty in finding my comrades, who were slowly advancing to meet me and who spurred their horses forward at my headlong coming. I turned beside Flood, in a shower of flying earth, and as we thundered down the road I jerked out my story in brief summary. He made no reply until we had all but reached the house; then he checked his horse and with a gesture commanded attention.

"Stormont and Sardis will come with me," he said evenly. "The rest of you will surround the house at the proper intervals and shoot down anybody attempting to leave."

Without further thought of concealment, we spurred our animals toward the front gate of the stone dwelling, and in a few moments confronted the blackness of the house.

I repeated my tale to the captain and omittted nothing; I knew that no word of mine could save Hamelin, even if I had wished to save him. But when I had finished, I said: "Captain, you must save *her!*"

He looked at me queerly in the darkness; a flash of lightning illumined his hard face and gleamed on his rifle barrel.

"Must?" he asked, and laughed a curious laugh.

Sardis sneered openly.

"You understand my use of the word," I replied. "It is a plea. . . . She loves him!"

He made no reply. In the heavy gloom I could now read nothing in his features. And suddenly I wondered if she would care to be saved.

"At least," I said, "she should be spared the sight of his death."

Flood laughed a low, amused laugh, and slowly nodded his head.

"All right, Stormont," he said. "Stay here, both of you." He rode in through the gate and turned. "There is to be nothing between you and Sardis," he added casually.

"If Sardis opens his lips I shall kill him!" I snapped, my hatred overmastering my caution.

Flood rode slowly back to our side.

"If either of you lifts a finger, I shall kill you both!" he said with deadly evenness.

Then, as we dismounted, he cantered lightly up to the house and, urging his horse up the steps onto the veranda, knocked with the butt of his whip on the door panels.

I shuddered, thinking how that terrible knocking would sound upon the hearts of a man and woman within.

Sardis was painfully silent. In the west the low thunder still mocked and muttered, but otherwise the stillness was profound. The great house rose before us at twice its normal height, and at the doorstep, sinister in the saddle, sat Flood—knocking—

The disturbing influence of the earlier hours again had fallen upon me; a weight lay heavily on my consciousness.

With infinite relief, I heard from within the walls the high voice of Robert Hamelin, made higher by its pitch of terror. It was asking the meaning of the midnight visit, but its agony was the answer to the question. For Robert Hamelin knew the object and meaning of our errand; I had seen it in his face when he saw my eyes looking in at him through the window.

Flood's voice replied in crisp authority:

"The Riders do not explain. What they command is that Robert Hamelin shall come forth. If he does not obey, his house will be entered and burned. If he comes forth like a man, his house and family shall be unmolested."

"To what does he go forth?" asked a clear, ringing voice that struck through me like an ecstasy of steel.

"To death!" replied Flood dispassionately. His voice might have been that of a presiding judge upon the bench.

"He will appear," cried the fearless accents beyond the door; and then we heard again the quavering tones of Robert Hamelin: "A moment—just a moment with my wife! I shall not keep you long."

Flood turned in the saddle and peered down into the darkness, then, wheeling

his horse, he rode down the steps and to the side of the walk.

"Ridenour and Payne will join Stormont and Sardis at the gate," he commanded, and our fellow executioners moved out of the shadows and advanced to our side.

We were all picked riflemen, but the firing party never exceeded four, and none ever had failed. Tonight one would fail.

The door slowly opened with a creaking sound that I shall never forget. Flood raised his hand, and instantly our four rifles were at our shoulders. Framed in the doorway appeared the tall dark figure of—

"My God!" I screamed. "Don't fire! *That is not the man!*"

Alone of them all I had sensed the situation, but my warning cry came too late. Three rifles flashed simultaneously as the captain's hand dropped, and with a sharp sob the figure in the doorway crumpled and fell. At the same instant, Flood cried out with an awful oath and pitched from his saddle to the earth.

I turned in horror to my companions at this double fall, and in the face of Sardis beheld the answer to my question. Before my flaming glance he leaped away and tried to raise his rifle, but I had dropped mine and now held my revolver in my hand.

I had fired before he could raise his arms, and he dropped half inside the gate and lay still. Then, bitterly calm, I turned upon my astounded associates.

"Sardis has murdered the captain," I said harshly. "Look after Flood, Ridenour; and you, Payne, hurry to the rear. Hamelin is escaping at the back."

But as I hastened after Payne, a sudden burst of firing at the rear of the house halted my steps. There were good men at the back, and by now Hamelin was dead and damned.

I returned and knelt beside our fallen leader. His well-trained horse stood quietly beside him.

"Still breathing," whispered Ridenour, "but he has no chance. I was once a doctor, you know!"

I nodded and bent over the dying man. His lips were trying to frame a sentence.

"Stormont," he breathed.

"Yes, Captain," I said obediently, and put my ear to his lips.

"I—loved her!"

"Yes, Captain," I repeated.

"She is—?"

"Yes, Captain," I said for the third time, lying easily. "She is safe. I will take care of her."

He squeezed my hand faintly and did not speak again. Tears were in my eyes as I arose, and my heart was heavy as I strode toward the steps.

There was no need for haste now, for two bullets at least had reached their mark in the open doorway. Oh, yes, we were all rifle men!

SHE LAY where she had fallen, half outside the door, lovely in death, beautiful even in the hideous men's garments she had donned to save the worthless coward who had allowed the sacrifice.

On her lips was sealed a secret smile, and in its sweetness I found the soul I had never known that I possessed.

Another Story by Vincent Starrett Will Appear in the Next Issue of WEIRD TALES. It Is Called "The Money Lender." Don't Miss It!

Will Tombs of Old Mexico Outrival King Tut's?

WEALTH of historical interest and treasures surpassing those discovered in the tomb of the Egyptian King Tut may be brought to light on this side of the globe. In Yucatan and Guatemala, the locale of the lost Maya civilization, excavations are to be undertaken that should unearth revelations which are expected to outrival the trophies and wonders of the Egyptian find.

Dr. Marshall H. Saville, American archaeologist, has just returned from the districts of the ancient cities. In an address before the Archaeological Society of Washington, he told of the one-time civilization of ancient southern Mexico.

Almost a hundred years before the birth of Christ, the Maya Indians attained an advanced civilization. They were proficient artisans, architects, engineers, sculptors and painters. Records of the day were chiseled on monuments, walls of temples or written on a material resembling parchment. Leaves of this parchment have been discovered, pointing to the likelihood of their having been bound in volumes; indications are that whole libraries were buried in some of the tombs.

In their tombs the Maya people put many valued personal effects and costly ornaments with the corpses of the renowned. The burial vaults of the priests, who were also the intellectual leaders of the times, have been definitely placed as being under the floors of the temples. Accidentally, one of the latter tombs was opened, and in it were found rare jewelry of exquisite workmanship, jades and beautiful works of sculpture. The tomb was quickly sealed to protect its contents so that a wonderful opportunity of learning at first hand of the Maya people might be preserved to science.

Astronomy was one of the interests of the old Mexican race. Calendars were perfected which compare favorably with our own. On one column of a temple was found the figure of a woman bearing a globe upon her back and shoulders—significant because the bygone race may have thought the world to be spherical.

Certain of the temples rose to a height of more than three stories from the summits of pyramids, but, unlike the pyramids of the Egyptians, they were not used for places of burial. The inner walls of the temples were often finished in plaster and decorated with mural paintings. Outer walls were carved and chiseled in a manner similar to those of other eras.

Transportation was an element, for stone and concrete highways were laid through the jungles. Even today, portions of the roads exist.

There is a great deal that relates to the old civilization yet to learn, for engineers of that day drilled wells 280 feet deep through a solid strata of rock, although no evidence has been found which proves that instruments like the modern well drill were used. Disclosures illustrate the length to which investigations should proceed and the great historical value of possible discoveries.

An Uncanny Tale of a Flesh-Colored Plant

MANDRAKE

By ADAM HULL SHIRK

"FALLON, you've got to help me!" Dr. George Burton laid one hand, which trembled, upon the arm of his friend, the eminent psychologist, Professor Fallon, and fixed his tired eyes upon the latter's calm face.

"Of course I'll help you, George," said the scientist, reassuringly, "but first you must tell me just what is the matter."

Dr. Burton sat back in his chair and nodded slowly:

"Yes," he said, "I will. But—I don't understand it all myself."

"Never mind—go ahead—"

"You remember my writing you last Fall that I hoped to be married before so very long? Well, that hope may never be realized. This is the story: A couple of years ago, Power Marbury and his wife and two daughters came to Cranways. Six months later, Mrs. Marbury died. You may recall the case. The husband was convicted. It was murder, and though the evidence was purely circumstantial, there was never a doubt of the outcome. Power Marbury was sentenced to pay the extreme penalty and did so, unconfessed."

The physician rose and took a turn across the room before reseating himself. The psychologist said nothing. Presently the younger man continued:

"Can you imagine the effect on those two girls—Alice, not yet sixteen and Marjorie just two years her senior? Is it any wonder that they were stricken, almost driven insane? It was fortunate they had one friend in this narrow, hell-fearing community. Old Squire Broadman had been their father's executor, to care for the considerable property left to the two girls, but remaining in his hands until they should marry when it reverted to them automatically. He it was who defied the pious citizens and took them in, to share his bachelor home, like daughters of his own. Had it not been for him, Fallon, God knows what would have become of those two helpless orphans."

"What followed?"

"Fate seemed to be relentless," pursued the doctor, "and after a while Alice fell ill. I was called in. But in spite of all I could do, she faded, just as a flower transplanted to alien soil will wither and die. I exerted all my slight skill. The malady was apparently impervious to drugs. And in the end she—died. . . . That left Marjorie—alone.

"In the days when I had attended her sister, I learned to love her. I have never met a girl who was blessed with a sweeter disposition and how she bore up under it all, no one will ever understand. I had not spoken to her, of course, but some day I knew that I should do so, and that she would receive my proposal favorably I had good cause to believe. . . . This brings me up to recent events—events that have resulted in my sending for you, Fallon, my old friend!"

"You are welcome to my help—but you have not yet told me what the present difficulty is."

The physician sighed:

"I'm coming to that," he muttered. "It was about three weeks ago that I learned Marjorie had taken to visiting the cemetery where her mother and father and sister were buried. It lies just outside the village. I remonstrated with her, because I saw it was a means of keeping the tragedies ever before her mind. But it was of no avail. Then, about ten days ago, she was stricken—"

"Stricken?" The scientist looked sharply at his friend. "What happened?"

"She was found on her doorstep in a dead faint, a look of absolute horror frozen on her face. I was called, and it took me several hours to revive her. When she came to, she confessed to having been frightened, but that was all she could or would tell. Then I learned she had been to see a charlatan who has lately come to town and established himself in offices here—Valdemar is his name, and he claims to be a hypnotist, psychometrist, or something of the kind."

"I know the breed," nodded Fallon. "Go on. She saw him?"

"Yes. I deduced that this might be the cause of her collapse and visited him myself. He admitted her consulting him, that she seemed obsessed regarding her father's possible innocence and had asked his advice. He said he had been unable to help her. Indeed, he seemed so fair spoken that I could find no cause to blame him. But Marjorie grew worse. She has become morose and seems to have lost confidence not only in me, but even in her guardian, who is as deeply anxious as I am.

"Fallon, she is secretly worried or frightened, and it is driving her slowly mad. That's why I've sent for you. Can you help me—by helping her?"

The savant sat for a moment immersed in thought. Finally he nodded:

"I feel certain I can," he declared, "and I suggest that we call on the young lady at once. Can it be arranged?"

"Certainly—I was about to suggest it—"

"Introduce me as a brother physician visiting you—nothing more and—"

Fallon's speech was interrupted by a knock at the office door, and in a moment the attendant announced that Peleg White wanted to see the doctor urgently.

Burton turned to his friend apologetically: "He's a sort of half-wit I've befriended—it won't take a moment."

"Bring him in," suggested Fallon.

The old creature came haltingly into the room, a malformed, hesitating parody of mankind. His story was quickly told, however, and, strangely enough, bore upon their present problem:

"It's about Miss Marjorie, Doctor," he said. "I know she's a friend of yourn. Well, last night I slept out in the old hollow tree near the buryin' ground, and I seen her come stealin' in like a ghost. I wasn't afeared, though, an' I followed to where her father was buried. She kneeled right down by his grave, and I thought she was prayin'—"

"What was she doing—?"

"She was pullin' something up outen the ground—looked like a weed or somethin'. And just as it came 'way, they was the most awful onearthly shriek I ever heard in all my born days. Miss Marjorie she yelled out, too, and started to runnin' away. I run, myself. And then I knew you'd oughter know."

"Thank you, Peleg," said the doctor with a look of dismay on his face as he glanced at Fallon. "Here's a dollar for you. Don't say anything about this to a soul."

Mouthing his thanks, the half-wit hastened away. Burton turned to his friend.

"What does it mean?" he asked.

"It means," said the psychologist, "that the sooner we see Mis Marjorie, the better. Come along."

THEY found the girl alone, pale, indicating by her manner lack of sleep and a condition of extreme nervousness.

To their questions as to her feelings, she answered listlessly. The psychologist said little, but observed her every move and gesture.

Back at Burton's office, the latter asked:

"Have you formed any conclusion?"

The other shook his head negatively.

"Not as yet. But I can assure you of one thing. There is a cause for her malady that is not altogether pathological. It goes deeper, my boy—we've got to locate it."

On the following day, while the two men were seated again in the doctor's consulting room, Peleg White put in his appearance in a state of extreme agitation. Admitted to the office, he plumped down on the table a grotesque object that resembled nothing the physician could remember having seen in his experience.

"I just come from Miss Marjorie," panted the half-wit. "She wanted I should sell this durn thing for forty cents or less. Said I mustn't take as much even as half a dollar cause she'd paid that for it. Told me not to tell nobody she give it to me, but I reckon I kin tell you. Anyway, who'd give me even a penny for the thing."

"I will," said Fallon, before his friend could speak. "Here's exactly forty cents. Take the money right back to the lady and don't tell her who bought it. Here's a quarter for yourself."

When the creature had departed, Burton turned to his friend with the pain he felt written plainly on his face.

"In God's name," he cried, "what is it?"

Fallon took up the thing and examined it with deep interest. It was a vegetable of some sort, of a sickly flesh color so far as the root was concerned; black mould still clung to it, and when viewed from a certain angle, the root portion bore a most uncanny resemblance to a human body.

"This," said the psychologist, slowly, "is a mandrake. One of the first I've ever seen!"

"Mandrake?" Burton repeated in a puzzled tone.

"Exactly. The one plant concerning which superstition is almost universal. Many books have been written about it. Even Shakespeare refers to it—I think in 'Romeo and Juliet,' where he speaks of 'Shrieks like Mandrakes torn out of the earth'."

The doctor shook his head, shudderingly.

"I can't understand—"

"This much," said the scientist, quickly, "I do understand—we must get back to Miss Marbury at once."

Dr. Burton stared at him in sudden alarm.

"You mean she is worse?"

"I don't think so—but something must be done immediately. I suppose," he added, "you trace the connection between my quotation from Shakespeare and the story of Peleg about Marjorie at the cemetery?"

"You mean the shriek—that she was pulling this thing from the earth—?"

"It seems likely. But let us be going."

They found Marjorie so greatly improved on their arrival that Dr. Burton, at least, was overjoyed. His friend, however, seemed less impressed by her greater vivacity and the improved color in her cheeks. Seking an excuse for their return so soon after the previous visit—though the doctor himself was in the habit of calling almost every day—Fallon observed that he had wanted to look at some of the Squire's books which he had noted when they were there before.

"I'm sorry," said the girl, "the Squire is out. But you can make yourself at home there, anyway—in the library."

Fallon smiled at her as he expressed his thanks.

Dr. Burton followed him to the door.

"She's better, don't you think?"

"She's seen Peleg," murmured Fallon enigmatically, and left them together.

In the library, quite an extensive one, he browsed among the books, looked at several, rubbed some of the upper edges gingerly with his forefinger and read a few lines from certain volumes. He also examined the contents of a Japanese card tray on a table, slipped one card into his pocket, and made a note on a slip of paper.

When he returned, Marjorie was smiling happily, but, as he gazed into her face, he noted the sudden alteration in her expression. She was staring with increasing horror, past him at the doorway. Dr. Burton noticed the change at the same instant, and rose with a question on his lips. But Professor Fallon, seizing a stick from the corner of the room, slashed viciously at a small pinkish object that was crawling along the floor and through the draperies at the entrance.

The scientist followed, leaving Burton to care for the girl, who had sunk back on the couch, one hand at her heart:

"He lied to me," she whispered, "he lied—"

Then she fainted. As the physician set to work to revive her, sounds of a struggle from the hallway came to his ears and his friend's voice calling his name. He laid the girl gently on the couch and tugged madly at the bell rope. As he tore the curtains aside and rushed out a servant came screaming down the corridor—

"They're killing one another," she cried.

"Go to Miss Marbury," he ordered, and hastened to where Fallon was struggling in the grasp of someone who, in the dim light he could not at first recognize: then he caught a glimpse of the white hair and beard of Squire Broadman, just as the scientist cried out:

"Hurry, for God's sake! Can't you see he's crazy?"

Together they overpowered the maniac and bound him with a cord from the portieres.

"He was in a niche of the wall," explained the psychologist, as he regained his breath. "He jumped on me as I came out."

"What does it mean?" asked Burton.

"First 'phone for an ambulance to take him away. Then get an order for the arrest of that fellow Valdemar. After that I'll explain. How is Miss Marbury?"

"Fainted—but she will be all right. Wait for me—I'll use the 'phone downstairs."

A few moments later he returned.

"That's attended to. The ambulance is coming, and they'll get Valdemar—it seems they've got enough to hold him on, anyway—obtaining money under false pretenses or something."

Marjorie had fallen into a deep sleep under the ministrations of the psychologist, and Burton drew his friend into the library.

"For heaven's sake," he begged, "tell me what it means."

The other removed from his pocket another of those ill-favored vegetables and laid it on the table: "There," he said, "is the root of the whole matter.

You see tied about it a bit of silk thread? I broke it with my cane. The other end was in the hands of the madman. Briefly it is part of a diabolical plot to drive Miss Marbury insane or to the grave. It's God's justice that the one responsible suffered the fate he intended to inflict on another."

"Squire Broadman?"

"Of course. He would have lost control of the estate when Marjorie married, would he not?"

"Yes."

"That's it. Probably he has speculated with the money he held in trust. Now as to the Mandrake—and Valdemar: The cemetery story and the business of selling the plant were my first rays of light. In the library here I found, among other books, Thomas Newton's 'Herball to the Bible.' It had been much used—lately. No dust on it, such as the other books showed. This passage was marked:

> *"'It is supposed to be a creature having life engendered under the earth of the seed of some dead person put to death for murder.'"*

"In a more recent work, Skinner's 'Myths and Legends of Flowers' I discovered a dog-eared page on which I read this: *'The devil has a special watch on these objects and unless one succeeded in selling one for less than he gave for it, it would stay with him till his death.'* How does that strike you?

"But now we come to Valdemar. Here is a card I found in the Squire's card tray there. It's the charlatan's, you see. On the reverse is a memo in the Squire's writing—*'See V. tomorrow and get more mandrakes.'* You see, he was a benevolent old fiend. Of course, it was he who shrieked in the cemetery as she tore up the mandrake. It's hellish—that's all. Now let's see Valdemar."

THEY found the eminent psychometrist in the city jail, much perturbed and decidedly crestfallen. He told them, under methods not far removed from the third degree, his part in the transaction: Broadman had been working on the girl's mind, telling her she ought to vindicate her father's memory if she could, and sent her to Valdemar, whom he had previously hired to help in the nefarious scheme. He told her to go home and if anything happened to tell him.

As she reached the door, a white figure rose in the dark hallway—as prearranged—and commanded her in sepulchral tones neither to rest nor sleep till her father's memory had been cleared. She swooned.

Then she told the Squire, but he cautioned her not to speak to the doctor about it and again to consult Valdemar. Broadman had read the mandrake stuff and the charlatan had arranged to secure some of the plants—goodness knows where—and suggested to Marjorie that she plant one on the grave of her father. Later, if she pulled it up, and the thing shrieked, she would know her parent had been justly punished. It had merely to be planted one day and torn up the next, they told her, to attain the desired results.

She had paid fifty cents for the thing, it seems, and naturally threw it from her when she heard the awful cry. Returning home, she found what she believed to be the same mandrake somewhere about her room, for as Skinner's book had further said: *"Throw it into the fire, into the river. . . . so soon as you reached home, there would be the mandrake, creeping over the floor, smirking human fashion from a shelf or ensconsed in your bed!"*

She told Valdemar, and he assured her that if she sold the thing for less than she had paid for it, the curse would be removed. She tried this, but again one of the dread plants crept across the floor. Then the end had come swiftly. Doubtless, Valdemar admitted, the squire was himself half demented for years. Burton, putting two and two together, believed that in some subtle way Broadman had brought about the death of Alice, as he had hoped to encompass that of Marjorie, or at least to drive her insane, so that she might not marry and thus automatically expose his own guilt in the matter of the money.

"Which proves," remarked Fallon, as he bade his friend good-bye at the station the following day, "that it pays to read abstruse matter sometimes. I knew the legend of the mandrake long before I refreshed my memory of the thing in Squire Broadman's library!"

THE GARDEN OF EVIL

BY CLARK ASHTON SMITH

Thy soul is like a secret garden-close,
Where the cleft roots of mandragores enwreathe;
Where lilies and where fumitories breathe,
And ivy winds its flower with the rose.

The lolling weeds of Lethe, green or wan,
Exhale their fatal languors on the light;
From out infernal grails of aconite,
Poisons and dews are proffered to the dawn.

There, when the moon's phantasmal fingers grope
To find the marbles of a hidden tomb,
In cypress-covert sings the nightingale;

And all the silver-bellied serpents pale
Their ruby eyes among the blossoms ope,
To lift and listen in the ghostly gloom.

Deed 2,230 Years Old Unearthed

AN AGREEMENT between a locksmith named Pani and and a soldier named Paret, for the sale of a city house, was recently translated by Dr. Nathaniel Reich. It is in the form of a notary's agreement and is inscribed on a strip of papyrus recently brought to the University of Pennsylvania Museum from Thebes, Egypt.

The antiquity of the document is established by the dating: "In the month of Tybi of the tenth year of Pharaoh Alexander, son of Alexander." This ruler was the son of Alexander the Great, who was assassinated some time before the agreement was drawn up, so it is evident that Petesche, the notary, had not been apprised of the young Pharaoh's death.

It is interesting to note that, as in modern times, considerable care was exercised in locating the building to forestall the possibility of litigation, as shown by the following legal description:

"It stands in the northern quarter of Thebes, at the western place of the wall. Its neighbors are on the north of the houses of Petcharpe, the King's street lying between them; east, a house which is 2½ cubits of land (250 square cubits) which I sold to Khenseu, son of Uzeher."

The Mysterious Midnight Visitor Played An Important Part in This Murder Trial

PEOPLE vs. BLAND

By THEODORE SNOW WOOD

IN THE COURSE of my practise of law I have gained considerable reputation for my ability in the solution of mysteries; but, strange to say, the case which first brought me into public notice and laid the foundation for this reputation was one which caused me to lose confidence in my own powers.

Although, in the eyes of the public, the enigma contained therein was satisfactorily answered, the circumstances presented a riddle the key to which I have never found.

Some ten years ago, my partner and I, young "limbs of the law," occupied an office in one of those rare old buildings innocent of such frivolities as elevators and hall men. Our business office, though by courtesy designated in the plural on its gilt sign, consisted of one large, gloomy and weird old room located on the second floor and reached by a long flight of creaky stairs.

My partner was responsible for its selection; he was guided by the double theory that a certain amount of eccentricity was a valuable quality in a professional man and that the antiquated building might shed a sort of mellowness over our own young careers.

Mine has always been rather a sensitive nature, readily in sympathy with all beings, and, in consequence, just as readily put out of tune by a false note in my surroundings. It is doubtless for that reason that I have found my mind serves me to the best advantage during the hours around midnight. I have, at this period, a mental buoyancy and a sense of freedom from outside influences that come to me at no other time.

So it happened that on a summer's night, a decade passed, as the clock in the neighboring church boomed the hour of twelve, I was seated at a table in my office surrounded by books and deep in precedents. An unimportant case had wandered my way, and I was determined, by thorough preparation and careful handling, to make the smallness of the interest its least conspicuous feature.

The door stood ajar for ventilation, for the weather was warm; a single lamp stood at my elbow on the table, its rays, scarce penetrating to the corners of the room, making grotesque shadows among the furniture—a collection of antiques as old-fashioned as the building itself.

I was deeply engrossed with the decision I was reading, and why I looked up I do not know, as I had heard no sound; but I raised my eyes from the book and was somewhat startled to see a man standing directly across the table from me.

A pair of keen dark eyes were set in a face of singular earnestness; the black hair above a high forehead was thinning; a small mustache surmounted a kindly mouth. Something about his appearance struck me as peculiar, yet what, for the life of me, I could not say.

"Well, sir, what can I do for you?" I asked.

In a voice very low, but clear and distinct, he replied:

"I desire to engage your services for the defense of my brother, Egbert Bland, charged with murder."

Perhaps I should have been surprised at this abrupt opening; perhaps I should have been in doubt as to his good faith—as to his sanity, even—but I was not. Why? Again, I do not know.

"Won't you take a chair?" I said.

He made a graceful gesture of refusal.

"His case will come up tomorrow," he continued. "I should like you to be in the court room at ten-thirty."

He then named the court at which I was to appear, adding, "You will be well repaid," and with a low bow, left the room.

I FOUND it impossible to continue my researches that night; I could not get my mind away from my midnight visitor.

The more I considered the incident the more astonishment I felt—not at his behavior, but at my own. Why had I received such a commission tendered in such a manner, as though it was quite an ordinary occurrence and without asking a single question?

The next morning in the bright light of day I almost felt disposed to regard the whole matter as the product of my imagination. Nevertheless, I resolved to keep the appointment.

As I entered the court room shortly after ten o'clock I was astonished to see in the prisoner's dock a man whom I at once recognized as my client from his resemblance to my visitor of the night before. There were the same keen eyes, the same earnest face and sensitive mouth; but the black hair was thick and wavy, and he wore no mustache.

All my previous speculations were immediately forgotten, and I was a little nettled to find that the accused man was provided with counsel and the proceedings already begun. I was pleased to note, however, that he was represented by Major Rankin, a lawyer of considerable experience, with whom I had a slight acquaintance.

"Good morning, Major," I said, as I slipped into a chair beside him; "there seems to have been a slight mistake on the part of somebody. I was engaged on this case last night by a relative of this man."

"All right, Mr. Trollusk," he said, with a friendly smile, "sit in and help. Glad to have you associated with me, and—our friend needs all the help he can get, I am afraid."

There was nothing to do except follow his suggestion, and I prepared to watch the case as it developed from the testimony, inwardly swearing at the stupidity of my client's brother in not giving me a better opportunity for preparation.

The tedious preliminaries were finally concluded and a jury selected, Major Rankin making every effort to secure twelve men of middle age who never had before served on a criminal case, evidently relying more on their sympathy than on the strength of the evidence he had to offer.

The prosecuting attorney, a methodical man, had arranged to present his witnesses in logical sequence and was considerably vexed, I discovered, to find that the witness with whom he desired to open—one Hiram Hankles—was confined to his room with a nervous attack and would not be permitted to appear until the following morning.

The first witness called, therefore, was an employe of a firm of lawyers, who said that on June 30th, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, he had taken to the office of Roy Bland (the murdered man) on the tenth floor of the Corporations Building, a package containing negotiable securities of considerable value, which Bland had just inherited from a distant relative, under a will drawn before the birth of Egbert Bland, the younger brother. No codicil had been found, and Egbert had no interest in the estate.

"Who were in the office at the time?" the witness was asked.

"Mr. Bland; his secretary, Mr. Hankles, and his brother."

"Please describe the office."

"The office consists of two rooms. The door of the outer office is directly opposite the elevator; the inner office is to the right as you enter, and is on the corner formed by the side hall which runs to the back of the building."

"Have you visited this office more than once?"

"Yes, several times."

"How many means of entrance has it?"

"Two; the main door opposite the elevator and a door in the inner office leading to the side hall. There are two other doors, one in each room, but both are closed by the furniture placed in front of them."

"Are the windows accessible from the outside?"

"No; they open on the court and there are no fire escapes near them."

"Who received the securities?"

"Mr. Roy Bland."

"What did he do with them?"

"He placed them in the safe in the inner office."

"Did he lock the safe?"

"Not while I was there."

"That is all."

Major Rankin, on cross examination, attempted to show that perfect good feeling existed between the two brothers, but the witness stated that he was in the office so short a time as not to be able to judge. The Major then asked:

"Could anyone enter the office without being seen from the elevator?"

"Yes, through the door opening on the side hall."

The witness was excused and an elevator operator of the Corporations Building took the stand. He testified that he had been running an elevator in that building for the past three years; that he knew all the tenants of the building; and that he was well acquainted with Roy Bland, who had occupied the same office for a number of years.

"Were you sufficiently acquainted with Mr. Bland to be able to identify him by his voice?"

"Yes; I have often talked with him."

"Have you ever seen his brother, the defendant?"

"Yes, he came to the building frequently to see his brother."

"Did he visit his brother on June 30th?"

"Yes."

"Was there any unusual circumstance connected with this visit?"

"They quarreled."

"Who quarreled?"

"The two brothers."

"How do you know?"

"I heard them. I stopped at the tenth floor going up, and I heard angry voices which I recognized as that of Mr. Bland and his brother."

"What were they saying?"

"I could not distinguish the words; I only know that they were speaking loudly and angrily. On the trip down Mr. Egbert Bland—"

"The defendant?"

"Yes, the gentleman there. He came out as I reached the tenth floor and slammed the door behind him and got in my car."

"Did he seem excited?"

"Yes."

"What time was this?"

"About half past four, I think. People were beginning to go home."

"When did Mr. Hankles leave the office?"

"At five minutes of five."

"How do you know the exact time?"

"He usually leaves just at five. I remember noticing the clock down stairs

and kidding him about quitting so early."

"Did he return?"

"I don't think so; I didn't see him."

"Can anyone reach the tenth floor from the street without passing the elevator?"

"No. The elevators are between the door and the stairways on the main floor."

"Until what time does the starter remain in the hall on the main floor?"

"About six o'clock; nearly all the tenants are out of the building by then."

"When do the elevator men quit?"

"All but one quit at six; he stays until seven."

"What happens then?"

"The night watchman comes on and locks the front door. He runs the elevator for anybody that wants to go up or down at night."

"Who was on duty between six and seven on June 30th?"

"I was."

"Did the defendant return to the building that day?"

"Yes."

As the witness spoke I heard the prisoner, who had sat with his head resting in his hands during the testimony, say softly to himself, "To apologize for my hasty temper, thank God!"

"At what time did he return?" continued the attorney.

"A few minutes after six."

"Was Roy Bland alive at that time?"

"He opened the door of his office just as my car reached his floor."

"Who else were in the building at that time?"

"A couple of girls on the eleventh floor."

"What employes of the building?"

"Only myself and the women who do the cleaning."

"After the defendant left, did you remain in the hall on the ground floor?"

"I left it once just before seven o'clock to get the two young ladies on the eleventh."

"Did any one else enter or leave the building?"

"No."

"How long did the defendant remain in his brother's office?"

"Fifteen or twenty minutes."

"Did you see Roy Bland in life afterward?"

"No."

Major Rankin then began the cross examination. I am a firm believer in the theory that a witness should never be cross examined without a definite purpose, and this case did nothing to shake that belief.

The Major, evidently grasping at the proverbial straw, tried his utmost to entangle the witness and induce him to contradict himself, but without success; he stood the gruelling patiently and even seemed to wish he could say something favorable, all of which merely served to strengthen his testimony and leave an impression on the jury that was very bad for the prisoner.

MRS. SMALL, the woman who cleaned the offices on that floor, was then called to the stand. She stated that at about half past seven she had opened the door with her master key—she was positive that the door was locked—and had entered Mr. Bland's office and switched on the lights and found Mr. Bland lying dead in front of the open safe in the inner office.

On the floor beside him, she said, lay a large iron clock which usually stood upon the safe. The clock was still running, as she distinctly remembered hearing its ticking in the moment of silence that followed her startling discovery. She then called the night watchman and gave the alarm.

The rest of the testimony was corroborative of Mrs. Small and included that of the physician who had examined the body. In the opinion of the latter, death had been produced by a blow upon the head from some blunt instrument, probably the clock. The injury could not have been self-inflicted by accidentally pulling down the clock, said the doctor, as the height of the safe was not great enough.

The case was then adjourned to the following day and I had an opportunity of consulting with the client, to whom I was duly introduced by Major Rankin. My sympathy for him was very much increased by this interview. He seemed greatly distressed by the loss of his brother and as ignorant as to its cause as was I.

He had called on his brother, he said, on a matter of business, had disagreed with him, lost his temper and quarreled. Later he had returned and made his peace and they had parted in excellent spirits. His brother's inheritance had not been mentioned; he knew he would have received a fare share of it although he had not been mentioned in the will, as his brother, who had always been more successful in business than he, was very liberal with him.

I regretted exceedingly that I had not been engaged on the case before. Having at that time, as I before intimated, considerable faith in my ability to solve such puzzles I wanted time to make my own investigation. Perhaps by working fast, I thought, I might learn enough to secure a new trial, and that might give me time to clear up the mystery. What a feather in my cap!

And how glad I would be to liberate this poor fellow, who I was sure was innocent and who seemed to be without money and without friends—except my visitor of the night before. And then I wondered why his brother had not been in the court room. In the excitement of the trial I had completely forgotten him.

So I pondered and dreamed on until midnight found me once more seated at my table in my dismal old office, in a silence broken only by the fluttering wings of a huge moth that had wandered in from the trees of the neighboring churchyard and with aimless energy was darting hither and thither about the room.

And once more I looked up and found my eccentric visitor standing before me.

BEFORE I could speak he addressed me; his voice was so low that I had to ask him to repeat his words before I understood that he was quoting a name.

"Miss Susie Elkins?" I responded inquiringly.

He nodded and motioned to a writing-pad on the table, from which I gathered that I was to take notes of what he would tell me. I took up a pencil and scribbled the name.

In making a dash at the end to represent a period—a habit with many who write rapidly—I broke the point of the pencil.

With a word of apology, I turned to a sharpener affixed to the wall, and ground a new point on the pencil.

When I again turned around I was astonished to find that I was alone!

I went to the door and looked into the hall, but my visitor was nowhere in sight. For a moment I was at a loss to account for his silent departure, but it occurred to me that the *whir* of the pencil sharpener might readily have prevented my hearing the creaking of the stairs.

But why should he have departed in such a manner?

The more I pondered over the case the more confused I felt over the whole mysterious affair. At last a very simple solution occurred to me: it was just a case of mistaken identity.

This man, my caller—whose resemblance to Egbert was remarkable—was the guilty man. He did not wish to see his brother convicted and was endeavoring to point a way to me to confuse the case and secure Egbert's acquittal, with-

out incriminating himself. Unquestionably, it was my duty to follow this plan.

I got up early the next morning and devoted two strenuous hours to following up my slender clue. At the end of that time I was in possession of information that I hoped at least might result in a disagreement of the jury.

I entered the court room just before the judge took his seat. Immediately after, the State's belated witness came into the room, leaning heavily on the arm of a companion and looking very feeble.

I leaned over and whispered to Major Rankin that I would like to conduct the case from this point. He graciously consented, thinking perhaps that I merely wanted to do something to show my connection with the case.

The witness was sworn and the direct examination began.

"What is your name?"

He cleared his throat and answered weakly:

"Hiram Hankles."

"Your occupation?"

"I *was* secretary to Mr. Roy Bland."

"Were you in the office of Mr. Bland on June 30th?"

"I was."

"State whether or not Mr. Bland received a package on that afternoon."

"He did."

"What was in it?"

"Negotiable securities."

"Did you see them?"

"I did. Mr. Bland examined them in my presence."

"What did he do with them?"

"Put them in the safe."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely."

"Did he lock the safe?"

"No."

"What time did you leave?"

"A little before five."

"What was Mr. Bland's custom about leaving the office for the day?"

"He usually remained a little while after five to read and sign the day's letters."

"Who were present when the securities were received?"

"Only his brother, Egbert Bland."

"A little louder, please; the jury can't hear you."

The witness repeated his statement.

"Did Egbert Bland see the securities?"

"Yes."

"Did he see them put away?"

"Yes."

"What was the attitude of the two brothers toward one another?"

"They quarreled violently."

"Before or after the package had been received?"

"After."

"What was the subject of the disagreement?"

"Money. Egbert Bland wanted my employer to furnish him with money to prosecute some scheme of his and was refused. Mr. Roy Bland said no man with any sense would undertake such a thing, and Egbert got mad; they exchanged several harsh remarks and Egbert left, slamming the door."

"What time was this?"

"About half past four."

"How long did you remain?"

"About twenty minutes."

"Did you leave Mr. Bland in the office?"

"Yes."

"Was the safe locked?"

"No."

"Were the securities then in the safe?"

"They were."

"When did you return to the office?"

"About nine that evening."

"Why?"

"I was sent for and informed that Mr. Bland had been found dead in the office."

"Were the securities in the safe when you returned?"

"No."

"Did you search the office?"

"Yes."

"Unsuccessfully?"

"Unsuccessfully."

The witness was then yielded to us. At a sign from me, Major Rankin said, "No questions."

The State rested, and I called my lone witness to the stand.

A BRIGHT-FACED young woman of twenty-five or thereabouts took the oath and announced her name was Susie Watson.

"Mrs. Watson," I asked, "were you in the Corporations Building on the thirtieth of June, last?"

"I was."

"In what connection?"

"I was a clerk in the office of the World Realty Company on the eleventh floor."

"Have you been there since?"

"No. I left my position to get married. I haven't been in the building since."

"Were you acquainted with the occupants of Mr. Bland's office?"

"Only with Mr. Hankles. He was a tenant of one of the World Company's houses."

"When did you learn of the death of Mr. Bland?"

"Today."

"How long had you been employed in that building?"

"Five years."

"Between six and seven o'clock, is it possible for anyone to enter or leave the building without being seen by the elevator men?"

"Oh, yes. When the one elevator running goes up they could use the stairs without being seen, because usually there is no one in the hall then."

"What time did you leave the building on June 30th?"

"I left the office at a quarter of seven. It was my last day there and I stayed late to finish up some work."

"How did you fix the time?"

"My sister, Jennie Elkins, had called for me. I remember that her watch had stopped and she set it by mine just as we rang for the elevator."

"Did you descend at once?"

"No. When the car came to our floor the scrub woman called down from the twelfth floor that she couldn't unlock a door. The man asked us to wait a minute and went up and opened it."

"How long did it take him?"

"Quite a while. Perhaps ten minutes."

"What did you do while you were waiting?"

"I went over to the stairway and leaned on the railing."

"What did you see there?"

"I saw Mr. Hankles walking down from the tenth floor."

"What was his appearance?"

The question was never answered, for just then Hankles gave a gasp and slid from his chair.

Several men sprang forward and lifted him to a table. A physician among the spectators tendered his services.

HANKLES revived sufficiently to admit taking the securities. He had been surprised by Bland, who he thought had left the building.

Bland had attacked him, and in defending himself Hankles had struck him with the clock. With almost his last breath, he named the location of the valuables.

The jury rendered its verdict without leaving the room, and Egbert Bland went forth into the sunlight, a free man.

In company with Major Rankin and myself, he went to the American Trust Company, and there in a safe deposit box he found the missing securities.

"Mr. Trollusk," he said, "I don't know how you learned what you did, nor even why you so fortunately came to my assistance; but I am happy to say that now I am able to recompense both Major Rankin and yourself, as I have no one to divide my little fortune with."

Astounded, I asked:

"But what about your other brother?"

He turned a puzzled face toward me.

"My other brother?" he repeated, "I never had but one brother."

Pride, affection and grief were plainly visible in his expressive face as he opened his watch and handed it to me.

The portrait contained in the case I instantly identified as that of my midnight visitor.

The Weird Adventures of Ah Wing Reach An Astounding End in the Final Installment of

The Evening Wolves

By PAUL ELLSWORTH TRIEM

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE EARLY CHAPTERS

AH WING, the Mysterious, is at war with the Evening Wolves, a sinister gang of outlaws, led by Monte Jerome and including Louie Martin, gem expert, and "Doc," their "society specialist." The war rages over a stolen diamond pendant of extraordinary value and beauty, which is in the possession of a Colonel Knight. Following a series of exciting adventures in Chinatown, the pendant falls into the hands of a member of the Wolves known as the "Kid." Meanwhile, Ah Wing has kidnapped Colonel Knight and is holding him in an eerie house, where the Wolves trail him in quest of the pendant. In a subtle and terrifying manner, Ah Wing disposes of the Wolves until there are but two left.

THE STORY CONTINUES FROM THIS POINT

CHAPTER NINE

"DOC" MAKES A DISCOVERY

MONTE and "Doc" walked silently away from the cottage on their way to the house of Ah Wing. There was a sense of impending catastrophe upon them, the realization of which neither was at any pains to hide.

They followed cautiously along the gravel road leading to the big house. Skirting the west wing, they took up their station in the shrubbery.

"I've an idea a man could get through one of those windows," Monte said in a low tone, pointing to the lighted panels of Colonel Knight's suite. "Of course, we could jimmy one of the bars off or use a hacksaw on it, but I don't believe that would be necessary—Billy could get between them, if they were bent a little!"

"Doc" nodded.

"It looks that way from here," he agreed. "It might be a good idea—"

"Sh!" came Monte's warning whisper.

A door had opened close at hand, and they could hear deliberate steps ascending a flight of stairs. From where they stood the basement door was invisible, but next moment the tall figure of Ah Wing came into view. He was carrying something which looked like a wire basket.

The Chinaman turned and walked away from the house. As his footsteps grew faint, Monte stepped out of the shelter of the bushes.

"You stay where you are and watch the house," he commanded. "I'm going to find out what that yellow devil is up to!"

He struck off into the darkness, and "Doc" found himself alone. In a way, this suited him admirably. He wanted to think.

"Doc" had observed the signs of open revolt among his companions, and the perception had caused him uneasiness. In spite of his habitual indolence, he was an observer and a thinker. He had read much on the history of organized crime, and he knew that the phase at which the gang called "The Evening Wolves" had now arrived was a dangerous one for each of its members. Monte had not been able to hold the men together. The gang was disintegrating.

Unaccountably "Doc's" mind turned back to the origin of this warfare between the Count Von Hondon and the wolves. Probably he knew more about the affair than anyone else except the count himself. It had been "doc's" association with a certain famous actress that made the original theft of the jewels possible.

Through this light-minded woman he had learned of the intention of a former dancer whose escapades with royalty had entertained the world to bequeath on her death—which was imminent, from an incurable malady—the famous Resurrection Pendant to Madam Celia. "Doc" had made it his business to become acquainted with the Mother of the Friendless, and had so worked his way into her confidence that he had become her accredited representative. When the bequest was put into effect, it was to the hands of this international crook and confidence man that the jewels were entrusted for transfer to the bank.

A picture flashed before the eyes of the watcher outside the house of Ah Wing: again he saw the face of Madam Celia, as he had last seen it. The pendant was then in the hands of the Count, who had taken French leave. And "Doc" had gone out of his way to see how one looked who had lost outright a king's ransom. He saw an old woman with a still, tired face. She was living in poverty, deserted by even those for whom she had done so much.

Within Colonel Knight's apartment he could hear regular footsteps. Cautiously, "Doc" drew himself up into the pepper tree and stood with his head raised somewhat above the level of the sill. So situated, he could see the former leader of the wolves, pacing the floor, his hands clasped behind his back, a cigar tilted up from one corner of his mouth.

Knight came slowly toward the window. The light struck fully upon his face, and "Doc" was amazed at the change that had come over it: the old florid coloring had changed to a dirty

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yellow, and there were sagging patches of water-logged flesh under the eyes.

The man in the lighted room paused and looked down at a reading table. Upon it lay a newspaper, which he drew aside. There was a leather-covered box on this table; and after staring gloatingly at it for a few minutes, the colonel opened the box and took out something which he held toward the light.

"Mine!" the watcher could hear him cry. "All mine—and soon I shall be free to do with it as I please!"

"Doc" slid down from the tree, his heart beating suffocatingly. In there, hardly twenty feet from where he was hiding, was a fortune! And one swift stroke now would make him master of it! His mind whirled as indolence and greed fought for mastery. The former counseled him to wait. Greed urged him to strike now, for himself.

"I might be able to get in while that Chink is away!" he meditated. "Those bars—"

He stepped out of the shelter of the bushes and crossed cautiously to the corner of the back wing. A metal basket, evidently designed to hold lawn clippings, stood there. "Doc" picked it up and carried it over under the window. Then he looked around and listened. He knew that he was playing a desperate game.

Then he thought of the mass of shimmering diamonds, and of the easy days in Paris and London they would buy. He would quit America, and live quietly and artistically—

He stepped upon the metal contrivance and stood slowly up. He could still hear Colonel Knight's restless footsteps.

Inch by inch, he drew nearer the bottom bar, till his fingers rested on it. It was loose! In fact it was *too* loose! A suspicion shot into the crook's mind: this was some sort of trap!

He leaped to the ground and replaced the basket. A better plan had come to him: he would hide in the basement areaway, and would slip in behind the Chinaman, when the latter returned.

"Doc" had made up his mind now to strike for himself. All the indecisiveness was gone. It was as if a stronger will had taken possession of him, and were driving him on to this hazardous undertaking. But those long years of idle enjoyment—they were worth the effort.

"Doc" slipped along close to the basement wall and approached the steps leading down to the basement door. Here he paused to listen: not a sound, save the distant throaty whistle of a steamer. He made his way down the steps and paused. The idea came to him that the door might be open. He tried the handle.

Next moment he had silently opened the door and was listening. Not a sound—but a strange, musty odor assailed his nostrils. He peered into the room, but the darkness was so thick that it seemed to present a solid black wall. His eyes had not yet adjusted themselves to the change from the upper air.

The thief stepped inside. Instantly the door closed behind him, and when he turned and reached for the handle he made a surprising discovery: *there was no handle on this side.*

He stood very still, trying to understand. A door without a handle—

In the darkness something was moving, and suddenly there came a sound which brought the hair up on the back of his neck. It was no sound with which he was familiar: it was like a continuous jet of steam, or like sand driven against the bottom of a tin pail.

And that odor was all about him. His eyes were adjusting themselves to the murky darkness, and he stared swiftly about. Nothing—

He had drawn his pistol, and now he took a step forward. A rustling sound reached him, above the sound of that horrible jet of steam. His knees were shaking under him, and he knew that he was on the verge of panic. This trap—that was what it was, he realized with a swift clearing of his mental processes. He had stepped into something prepared for him.

Across the room now he could make out a door, and toward this he rushed. He must get out of here, before that hidden horror revealed itself. Words babbled from his lips; sobbing oaths and prayers, strangely mingled. He was halfway across the room—he would make it—

And then, directly before him, there swung down from the darkness something that looked like a huge, flexible pipe. The hissing sound was in his face. Something struck his throat, and he was gripped by a pair of steel jaws that lifted him clear of the floor.

Before he could cry out, a coil of that round thing that had come at him whipped itself around his neck: another and another, and all that was left of the man who had robbed Madam Celia, Mother of the Friendless, swung like a pendulum between floor and ceiling.

AH WING, passing through the basement room half an hour later, paused to regard a curious sight: an amorphous, spineless thing that had once been a man, guarded by a great snake. The python was coiled like a huge ship's cable round the dead robber.

The Chinaman's eyes glowed as he crossed the room and made his way to an apartment on the second floor. Here he seated himself before a desk, and examined a chart pinned to the wall.

Deliberately he drew a cross opposite the name of the dead wolf.

"One left!" said he. "One—and my guest!"

CHAPTER TEN

THE POOL OF DEATH

WHEN MONTE JEROME followed Ah Wing back from the canal, he looked around cautiously for "Doc."

The latter had disappeared, but Monte stuck grimly on at his post till four o'clock. He had expected to be relieved by Billy and the "Kid" at two, but he heard nothing from them. He began to suspect that his followers had banded together against him.

"If they've pulled anything, they'll be beating it back for the city!" he told himself. "They'll have to catch the six o'clock ferry. Well, maybe I'll be there myself!"

The cold light of the early morning was filtering down over the marshes as he made his way back to the cottage. A light burned in the front room, but otherwise the little house was dark. Monte let himself quietly in and from force of habit hung his cap on the hall tree.

Then he entered the lighted parlor, and a startled oath escaped his lips: Billy the Strangler lay with his wolf's face turned toward the ceiling, his lids drooping, his mouth agape. A pool of blood on the floor told his brief story.

Monte stood for a moment staring down at the dead man. Then he turned and walked hastily along the little passage that led to his own room. Nothing was disturbed here, he discovered.

Suddenly a voice sounded, apparently at his shoulder:

"Ah, Mr. Jerome, we are approaching the final scene in our little drama! Greed and suspicion have done their work. Two of your men have murdered each other—"

With the snarl of a wild beast, Monte turned and dashed from the room. He crossed through the parlor and went bounding up the stairs. At the top he stumbled over something, which next moment he discovered to be the body of the "Kid." The dead gunman was smiling—

Again the voice sounded, this time from the direction of the "Kid's" bedroom.

"Greed, and suspicion, and superstition! I have not had to raise my hand

against one of these men, Mr. Jerome. The first of them to go was caught in that end window. It is an invention of mine, arranged with weights and multiplying levers. The window frame is of steel. I brought the body over and placed it in one of your beds, for the sake of the psychological effect. I knew that some of these men of yours were ignorant and superstitious, Mr. Jerome, and I wanted to shake their nerves! I succeeded. The body of the man whom you left on guard when you followed me across the marsh, tonight, will be decently buried. He encountered one of the watchers at my gate—"

Monte cried out hoarsely as he entered the bedroom. He picked up a heavy chair and made for the wall, from behind which the voice came. As he raised the chair, the voice spoke once more:

"I think the replica of the famous pendant will interest you. I had two of these imitations made. This one I placed in the bureau drawer downstairs. I knew that the man who found it would try to hide his discovery, and I counted on his being observed. I fancy that is what happened—"

With a bellow of rage, Monte brought the chair down. It struck the wall, and crashed through laths and plaster. Another blow cleared the debris away, and he was able to see the mechanism from which the voice proceeded.

"Another invention of my own," the metallic tones informed him. "An adaptation of the loud-speaker principle, plus a dictaphone. This has enabled me to catch much of the conversation that has gone on in your cottage, and to follow you and your friends from room to room. I had everything prepared before I went into the city to visit the art exhibition. This was the only house near mine, and I felt certain you would secure it! *I* shall now bid you farewell, Mr. Jerome! It is necessary for me to depart!"

Monte Jerome gritted his teeth and fought off the despair that assailed him. Ah Wing would almost certainly go south to the ferry. And Monte would catch the boat via the interurban.

HALF AN HOUR later muffled in a rain coat with a high collar, he was standing among the passengers on the lower deck.

Somewhere ahead was the blue limousine, which contained two passengers beside the Chinese chauffeur. Monte kept behind till the boat was approaching the city slip, when he made his way forward. His plan was to charter a taxi.

Suddenly he paused. From the machine belonging to Ah Wing a tall figure had descended. Monte saw the Chinaman speak to the man at the wheel, then join the commuters on the front platform.

The crook's mind worked fast. He was sure the other passenger in the limousine was Colonel Knight. If Ah Wing left the boat on foot, as he seemed on the point of doing, it would be impossible for Monte to follow both the Chinaman and the white man. Which one ought he to stick to?

Without hesitation, he decided that Knight could wait and that Ah Wing would have the pendant.

The Chinaman was off the moment the rope dropped. It was a foggy morning here in the city, and presently Ah Wing struck off up a side street lighted by yellow gas lamps. There was no one in sight now but the two men, the one leading, the other following.

Monte gripped the pistol in his side pocket and increased his speed. He wanted to face this terrible being who had created such havoc among the wolves.

The street before them tipped steeply up, and on a corner Monte saw the red-and-gilt ornamentation of a Chinese restaurant. They were entering Chinatown, and involuntarily the trailer increased his speed. Distinctly, the crisp footsteps of the man before him floated back. Monte was within thirty feet. He drew the pistol from his pocket—

Ah Wing turned into a narrow passage between two ancient buildings. Monte broke into a run and reached this turning. The Chinaman must have run, too, in the moment he had been invisible; for now he was far along toward the opposite end of the passage. Monte threw up his pistol and caught the sights. In the same instant Ah Wing seemed to melt into thin air, and Monte sprinted forward.

Half a dozen rotting wooden steps led down to an arched passage.

Monte paused. Would the Chinaman come out this same way? Perhaps he had come to this place to hide the very thing Monte had determined to take from him—

At that thought, the crook stepped boldly down into the arched doorway, turned to his left, and began to descend an inclined passage.

For a time he could hear steps going on ahead of him. Then they grew faint, and Monte realized that the man he was following had turned into a side corridor. He hurried on. The passage was growing more and more uncertain as to light and footing. He reached a cross tunnel, and paused.

A sound came from the right. Monte took a few steps in that direction and again paused to listen.

The feeling came to him that he was being watched. He whirled, and in that instant something struck him above the ear.

Without a sound, the crook crumpled to the floor.

AH WING stepped out of an alcove and looked dispassionately down at the man lying in a heap at his feet.

Stooping, he took from the relaxed grip of the wolf a heavy automatic. This he dropped into his coat pocket. Then he gathered the limp figure of Monte Jerome into his arms and continued his underground journey.

The way dipped steeply ahead, and the tall Chinaman advanced cautiously. Presently he came to a place where roof and walls had started to crumble. Shifting the weight in his arms, Ah Wing drew out a flashlight and sent the pallid beam into the darkness. A fragment of cement detached itself, and clattered to the glistening floor.

Ah Wing swung on till he detected signs of life in the burden he was carrying. Pausing, he placed the bandit on the wet floor and walked back along the passage till he was again within sight of the place where the ancient masonry was giving way. Drawing the pistol from his side pocket, Ah Wing deliberately fired three shots into the roof.

The effect was instantaneous: with a roar, the rock walls came tumbling down, completely shutting off this means of retreat. Ah Wing eyed the result with apparent satisfaction, then tossed the pistol in among the debris.

As he approached the spot where Monte had been lying, he saw that the wolf was sitting up, staring with bloodshot eyes into the light of the electric lantern.

"Ah, my friend, so you have come back from the land of shadows?" the Chinaman inquired. "I was sorry to have to resort to so crude a method of dealing with you, but time presses. The play is played out, Mr. Jerome. All of your comrades have gone before you, and now you and I have come to the hall of judgment. The High Gods shall decide between us. Perhaps They will condemn us both. Who knows?"

He paused, turning to stare along the passage.

"Behind us the way is closed," he continued serenely. "Ahead lies the place of trial. You will observe that the passage seems to end. This is but an illusion—what looks like solid floor is in

(Continued on page 93)

Otis Adelbert Kline Spins Another Grisly Yarn—

The Corpse on the Third Slab

OFFICER RYAN walked slowly along between two rows of cold, moist slabs on which reposed the chill, grisly remains of what had once been human beings.

He essayed a few bars of "River Shannon" in his rich, Killarney baritone, not loudly, yet with volume enough to drown the weird uncanny echoes that rang back from the walls and sloping ceiling of the morgue each time his heavy, hobnailed shoes came in contact with the floor.

Though he knew himself to be alone in the room, those echoes somehow gave him a feeling that he was being followed—a queer, creepy sensation that was far from agreeable. He stopped his humming abruptly. What was that? The sound of many voices mimicking his own? Suddenly he realized—and laughed. A myriad hollow cackles answered him.

His face grew sober again, and he roundly cursed his superior who had detailed him for special duty in this ghastly place, all because a corpse which nobody could identify, and consequently nobody wanted, had been stolen the night before.

He glanced at the dial of his watch. It was nearly one o'clock. Five long, dreary hours must pass before he could go home to the wife and kiddies.

An attendant had thoughtfully placed a chair from the office for him at the far end of the room. His instructions were to patrol the place every half hour. As it took him only five minutes to make the rounds, there was twenty-five minute intervals of rest twice in every hour. He hurried his pace a little as he neared the chair. Once seated thereon, he would at least be rid of the sound of those haunting footsteps.

He was walking along, swinging his night-stick with attempted jauntiness, when, out of the tail of his eye, he saw, or imagined he saw a slight movement of

the sheet covering the corpse at his right. He stopped petrified with amazement, and stared at the thing on the cold, gray slab, while a strange prickly feeling coursed the length of his dorsal vertebrae.

With forced bravado he stepped up beside the still figure and turned back the sheet. The corpse, which lay on the third slab from the end, was that of a middle aged man, gray haired, slightly bald, and dressed in the garb of a laborer. No doubt the face had not been unpleasant to look at in life but in death it was hardly a thing of beauty, with its glassy, staring eyes, sagging lower jaw, and protruding, blue-white tongue.

Ryan replaced the sheet with a shudder and hurried to his chair. The place certainly got on his nerves. He had known that it would when Chief Howell assigned him to it and, in observation of the old proverb, "Forewarned is forearmed," had made due preparation for the exigency. The preparation was very simple. He had poured some pale amber liquid from a large round bottle into a small, flat bottle. The flat bottle reposed snugly in his hip pocket.

The large, round bottle, a gallon of "moon," had been a present from a bootlegger friend.

"Don't be afraid to drink it like wate., Ed," his friend had told him. "I know it's all right 'cause I made it myself. You won't find no slivers in that hooch."

Despite the admonition of his friend, the bottle had reposed in the Ryan basement for six months, untouched. Ryan was not an habitual drinker, but he believed in "kapin' a nip in the house for emergency."

He glanced slyly toward the office door, then extracted the bottle from his hip pocket, pulled the cork, and held it up to the light to admire its color and lucidity as a connoisseur admires rare old wine. With some dismay, he noticed that it was nearly two thirds empty, whereas the night was scarcely more than half gone. He must cut down the size of his drinks, or go without during the wee, small hours. He would cut down, too, after this one. Just this once he must have a man's size shot.

He needed it sorely. The staring eyes and lolling tongue of that corpse on the third slab had set his nerves on edge. Placing the bottle to his lips, he drank deeply, corked it, and returned it to his hip pocket with a sigh.

"Sure, and that Wop knows how to build booze," he muttered. "Goes down as smooth as oil, and it has a flavor like tin year old bottled in bond."

He sat in silence until his watch told him that it was time to make the rounds again, then rose reluctantly to perform his distasteful duty.

When he arrived opposite the third slab he resolutely looked straight ahead. Thus, he reasoned, if the thing should move he would not see it, and there would be no harm done. Ryan had overlooked the fact that he had a pair of perfectly good ears, and that they were in excellent working order. A slipping, sliding, soul-sickening sound from the direction of the third slab, acted as a forcible reminder.

With a gasp of horror, he fairly flew to the chair. He sat down weakly, mopped the cold perspiration from his forehead, and finished the contents of his bottle at one gurgling gulp.

Ryan had made up his mind not to look in the direction of that slab again, and when he made up his mind he was a hard man to change. With stubborn determination to carry out his plan, come what might, he pivoted his swivel chair a half turn and settled down to await the dreary passage of another twenty-five minutes.

"Now let the damn' thing turn over all it wants to, or do a toe dance, for all of me. Oi'll not give it the satisfaction of watchin its devilish capers," he resolved, half aloud.

That last drink had been a stiff one. In fact, it would have made four good husky drinks for as many hearty lumberjacks or longshoremen.

Ryan grew drowsy. Decorators had been at work in the morgue that day, white enameling the walls, and he told himself that the smell of the turpentine made him sleepy—that and the cursed dank, musty odor of the place itself. His head nodded until his chin rested on one of the gold buttons that adorned the front of his uniform.

Some time later he awoke with a start and looked at his watch. He looked again, rubbing his eyes to make sure that he was awake. Surely he had not slept more than ten minutes, yet the hands told him it was four-thirty.

He wondered what had awakened him. There had been a noise of some sort. He dimly remembered that much, but, try as he would, he could not recall the nature of the sound.

Suddenly, and with startling distinctness, the noise was repeated. It was the sharp click of a heavy shoe on the hard, concrete floor. Scarce had the hollow echoes died when he heard it again.

Someone was walking toward him with slow, dragging footsteps *from the direction of the third slab!*

RYAN was no coward. On the contrary, he had shown marked bravery in many encounters with desperate bandits and thugs of the underworld. Neither was he superstitious. He believed that when a man was dead he was gone; and that was that. His soul might go to purgatory, and thence to heaven or hell, but never return to earth. Yet, despite his inherent bravery and his firm theological convictions, he could not bring himself to swing his chair about and face the *thing* that was approaching.

In fact, he discovered, to his utter horror, that he was unable to move. He could not so much as lift his nerveless hands from the arms of the chair. Even breathing was difficult, as though great chains had been wound about his body, pinning him against the chair back.

Deliberately, painfully, those weird, echoing footfalls approached. The *thing* was almost upon him, yet he could not move nor utter a sound. An odd, misshapen shadow appeared on the floor in front of him. Slowly it crawled up the side of the wall, its grotesque outline gradually assuming human form.

Then the *thing* itself appeared. The invisible chains about Ryan's chest tightened, and icy fingers laid hold of his wildly beating heart and squeezed it until it pounded eccentrically, like an engine with cracked spark plugs, for he recognized the gaunt figure and grisly features of the corpse from the third slab!

It stood there before him, swaying slightly, then extended its gnarled left hand and steadied itself against the wall. As those glassy eyes stared into his, Ryan's palate seemed to shrivel and dry up. It rattled like a dead leaf in a gale with each intake of his breath.

Evidently the corpse was trying to converse with him, for its blue-white tongue and lips moved slightly. Presently it obtained some measure of control over them and spoke in a hoarse, husky whisper:

"G-good evening."

Ryan was too petrified with horror to reply.

The corpse looked at him curiously for a moment. Evidently it reached the decision that it had said the wrong thing. It tried again:

"G'morning, oshifer."

The policeman's tongue seemed glued to the roof of his mouth.

"Sha matter? Ya deaf and dumb?"

To his amazement, Ryan heard himself speaking. Anger at the other's insulting insinuation had loosed his tongue.

"No. Oi ain't deaf and dumb. Oi don't talk tothe likes of yez, that's all. Now go back and lay down on yer slab and behave yerself, or oi'll kill yez deader than yez are already."

The corpse leered horribly. Then it laughed—a cackling, graveyard laugh that brought on a fit of coughing.

"Fooled you, too, did I?" it rasped. "Fooled 'em all. Fooled the old woman. Fooled the ash man. Fooled everybody."

"Go wan. You ain't foolin' nobody."

"Fooled 'em all, I tell you. She put chloroform in my hooch. Wanted to 'lope with the ash man. Don't care. Let her 'lope an' good riddance. Damned she-devil, anyhow. But I fooled 'em. They think I'm dead, but I ain't. No more dead 'n you are."

"The hell you ain't!" growled Ryan.

"Tell you I ain't," wheezed the corpse, testily. "Can't I walk? Can't I talk? Can't I do anything any live person can do?"

"Course yez can," agreed Ryan, who felt that he was beginning to see the light. "Anything can walk in a dream—even a corpse. Oi wance saw a kitchen table do the toddle with a grand piano in a nightmare."

"Who said anything about a dream? I'm not a dream and I can prove it."

"Yez'll have to show me," said Ryan. "Oi'm from St. Louis."

"All right. If I was a dream you could see and hear me, but I couldn't see or hear you. Am I right or wrong?"

"Right."

"F'r instance, I wouldn't know whether you was a bull or a ballet dancer. I wouldn't be able to tell if you was smooth-faced or wore a set of Patsies."

"Sure yez wouldn't, and yez don't."

"Don't I, though. Get this. You're a big, overgrown, dishfaced, bull-necked cop, with a long, loppy carrot-colored set of soup-strainers that makes you look like a seasick walrus."

Ryan tried to rise and smite the presumptuous one but the invisible bonds held him. He gritted his teeth.

"Yez'll suffer for this, dream or no dream, corpse or no corpse," he groaned.

The corpse stared glassily, unmoved by his threat.

"You know," he continued, "I've been in better jails than this. No heat—no blankets—nothing. The beds are cold as ice and hard as rocks, and the sheets are thin as paper."

Ryan was astounded. Could it be possible that this corpse didn't know it was in the morgue?

The thing yawned, disclosing its ghastly, blue-white tongue.

"Ho, hum. Gettin' sleepy again. Guess I'll crawl back in the old sheet-rock bunk. G'night, bottle-nose."

This was too much for Ryan. His naturally florid countenance turned purple with anger as he watched the ghoulish figure stagger slowly toward the third slab. If he could only move! He concentrated his gaze on his little finger. Even it was incapable of motion, he thought. He tried to wiggle it, nevertheless, and lo, it wiggled. He essayed to lift his hand. It lifted. He was overcome with joy.

Rising carefully and noiselessly from the chair, he tiptoed stealthily after the corpse. First he thought to lay a heavy hand on its shoulder, but he could not bring himself to touch it. Revenge—sweet revenge was almost within his grasp, yet he dared not grasp it. Then came an inspiration. Shifting his bulk to his left foot, he poised his right and took careful aim at the tattered hip-pocket.

Somehow—perhaps because the pocket was moving, or mayhap because the amber liquid had befuddled his vision—he miscalculated the range. The heavy, hob-nailed boot traveled upward to where a solid target should have been but wasn't, and kept on traveling. It would probably have soared upward to the ceiling had it not been most intimately connected with Ryan's anatomy. As it was, it jerked his left foot from under him, the back of his head collided with the floor, and he caught a momentary glimpse of a hitherto unheard of, gloriously brilliant stellar constellation.

Then a curtain of dismal darkness descended around him, dragging him down to oblivion.

RYAN'S first approach to consciousness after that was a half-dreaming, half-waking state. He was under the impression that he was a corpse, lying on a cold, gray slab.

He put out his hand, then jerked it back hastily. He *was* lying on something cold and hard. This discovery quickly and thoroughly awakened him. He sat up and groaned, as a sharp pain shot through his head. Surely something had laid it wide open in the back. He felt it tenderly, and discovered a beautifully rounded contusion.

Suddenly he heard the hum of voices. One voice in particular sounded like that of Chief Howell.

He rose hastily, picked up his cap, and dusted his uniform. His watch told him it was six o'clock. He tried to recall how and why he was lying on the floor with a goose-egg on the back of his head. At length he remembered, and glanced suspiciously toward the third slab. It was occupied, nor had the corpse apparently been disturbed, for it lay just as he had seen it when he passed at one o'clock, with the sheet draping its angular figure.

The sound of voices grew more distinct. Someone had opened the office door. Chief Howell was holding it open while two attendants entered, bearing a litter on which lay the body of a coarse, thick-featured woman. Her face was horribly mutilated and her hair and clothing were stained and matted with blood.

The attendants, casting about for a vacant slab, noted that the fourth was unoccupied, and conveyed the body thither.

Chief Howell called to someone who had just entered the office through the outer door.

"Come in, Coroner. I guess we've got this thing straightened out for you now."

Coroner Haynes entered, and the two walked over to the third slab. The chief drew a photograph from his pocket and, raising the sheet, compared it with the features of the corpse.

"It's him, all right," said Howell.

"Who?"

"This woman's husband, Frank Merlin. She killed him night before last—put chloroform in a bottle of moonshine whisky he had so she could elope with the ash man. As soon as he was dead she called up her affinity, who carried the body out to his cart, wrapped in gunny sacks, and hauled it to another part of the city where he dumped it in a dark alley.

"Last night she and her sweetheart got into a drunken argument and he almost cut her to ribbons. Neighbors, hearing the rumpus, called the officer on the beat. When he arrived the woman was dead and the man, beastly drunk, had to be clubbed almost into insensibility before he would submit to arrest. When he was brought in I doused him with cold water and sobered him up. After a severe grilling he confessed all."

Ryan listened to the story with bulging eyes. He had regarded his experience of the night before as a dream. What if, after all, it was a reality?

He started for the office, when something arrested his attention—the mark of a human hand on the newly enameled wall, as if someone had leaned against it. He recalled the attitude of the corpse as it stood by that wall the night before, and curiosity drew him irresistibly to the third slab.

The left hand was lying palm downward, and he turned it with difficulty, for rigor mortis had set in. Then he cried out in amazement at what he saw.

The palm of the dead man was smeared with sticky, half-dried, white enamel!

The Author of "Beyond the Door" Spins Another Eerie Tale in His Masterful Style

The Guard of Honor

By PAUL SUTER

JUGRAND and Marvin agree that Craddock acted very strangely that night.

After growing sleepy and confused, staring into the fire in the lounging-room of the club house, he rose from his chair, passed through the double glass doors into the next room, and reclined beside Doctor Wilford Sawyer. Doctor Sawyer lay in his coffin.

Against the wall, paralleling the coffin, was a leather couch. It was on this couch that Craddock stretched himself out and went to sleep.

These three—Craddock, Marvin, and Jugrand—had been Wilford Sawyer's closest friends. In the course of years they had penetrated, though but slightly, behind the veil of his odd, aloof personality; witnessing gladly his rise to fame; standing by him now in death.

One of them—Craddock, the surgeon—had brought him back from the far-away spot where he had been found, dead; that spot to which he had fled madly, yet perhaps with a wisdom beyond sanity. Through the offices of all, he had been laid in state in the club house, rather than in his own formal bachelor apartments. They were paying final homage to him as Guard of Honor, through that long night before the funeral.

Some time in the course of that night, ere his astounding exit into the other room, Craddock began to talk. Before that, nothing much beyond gloomy monosyllables had entered into the conversation.

Marvin, the artist, had been pacing up and down the room, or sitting, bowed, in a Morris chair. Jugrand, professor of psychology for unreckoned years in the university, was crumpled inelegantly in a Turkish rocker. When he opened his half-shut eyes, the firelight glistened from their faded blue, bristled his white moustache to the point of grotesqueness, made his red cheeks seem frightfully puffy. All three of them were uneasy.

Something extraordinary hovered above their heads; a sense, it seemed, of some tremendous event hesitating on the threshold. Whatever they said took on significance and authority in proportion as it bore upon the breathless presence on the farther side of the glass doors. So it was that they listened intently—painfully—when Craddock started to tell of an informal party which he and Doctor Wilford Sawyer had attended together.

"In this room—a year ago. There must have been a dozen of us, more or less. Someone suggested that each of us tell something he did as a boy—some adventure—something out of the ordinary."

"As a boy—yes?" Marvin prompted, nervously.

He untwisted his lean legs from the Morris chair where he happened to be coiled, just then. He was suddenly on the alert.

"Someone suggested it; I don't remember who. And, without a word of explanation, Sawyer took his hat and coat and left the house."

Craddock paused and peered into the fire, as if the scene were reenacting and clarifying itself there.

"I followed," he went on. "We walked together back to his apartment.

I can't recall his saying half-a-dozen words to me, the whole way. When we reached his place, we threw ourselves into chairs, with the lamp between us. We must have sat there half an hour before he began to talk."

"And then—?" It was Marvin again, sitting on the edge of the Morris chair, propping himself precariously with his long legs.

"Then he told me everything—everything that he knew, himself. It was not much; but it explained a good deal. I had suspected something of the sort."

Jugrand nodded, without interrupting. Craddock supported his absurdly delicate chin on his hand, still staring into the fire with tired eyes.

"It seems simple. I could tell it in ten words, and I suppose there is no reason why I should not—now. Yet, it's devilish, too. I thought, after he told it to me, sitting there by the lamp, that he was like the man in the New Testament—the one with the evil spirits. He was even worse off, for in his case the spirits had taken his life and ripped it squarely across."

Talk is infectious. Let one man, in a silent company such as that, start it, and soon all the others are eager to follow his example. Craddock paused, communing a little too long with memory; the uneasy atmosphere of expectancy settled lower over them; then, abruptly, the artist began to speak. Jugrand watched him, curiously.

"I remember an odd thing, now we're on the subject. It was one night when I was having a studio party. Sawyer dropped in. He put a queer question to me, that night. I was showing him a picture of mine—that one of Orpheus, with the rocks and trees in the background. He said to me, 'Suppose you forgot the background—what effect would that have on the picture?'"

"Are you sure he said, 'forgot'—not, 'omitted,' or 'left out'?" Jugrand cut in.

"I remembered the word because it was unusual for him," the artist returned. "He almost never used slang, you know."

"What did you tell him?"

Marvin shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't recall. He didn't carry the discussion any further. What puzzled me was the question, itself. Why should he have asked a question like that?"

No one answered. After a time, Jugrand rose, with an air of heavy resolution, ponderously adapted himself to a standing position, and walked over to the double glass doors. He looked through them, intently. The lines of thought gave his face something of power and charm, despite its fatness. The others stared at him, as he stared through the glass.

When he resumed his chair, which still rocked gently, he addressed himself to the surgeon:

"I like to play sometimes with a theory—a fanciful theory—that the brain cells continue to work for a while after what we call death. Why do we call it that? Simply because our crude instruments can no longer detect signs of life. We have no proof but that decay—even embalming, perhaps—may precede absolute death by an appreciable interval."

He stopped, with his eyes on the surgeon. It was as if he were feeling for some unthinkable result, grotesque, like his own fat cheeks. Craddock's narrow face looked pale and tired. He groped for a rocker, and fell into it, chin on hand. He stared steadfastly into the fire.

Jugrand asked him a quiet question:

"Do you suppose he was thinking of this trouble when he talked to Marvin about 'background'?"

"I think he must have been," Craddock answered, slowly. "Yes—'background' expresses it very well."

"Then 'forgot' was not slang."

The artist leaned forward. His sharp face was vivid with eagerness. In his excitement, he fished a gold case from a pocket, and had a cigarette between his lips before he recollected and threw it ruefully into the fire. Sawyer had not been a smoker.

The psychologist spoke again, gutturally:

"I am the only one of us who was here before he came. That was thirty years ago. His mother was with him—a tall, slender, silent lady. She died that same year."

"You knew them then?" the surgeon asked. His voice was drowsy.

Jugrand nodded.

"I attended her funeral. He looks very much like her. The clergyman had a hard time getting enough information for his address."

Marvin relaxed in a brief smile. There is grim humor in the professional funeral eulogy. Then, as if fulfilling a difficult duty, Craddock palpably roused himself and launched into the remainder of what he had to say.

"He told me, that night, of an illness he had had. I think he knew nothing himself of the details. In fact, I am not sure he would have been aware of the main event, even, but for his mother. *She* had told *him*. He had been desperately ill; and he had come out of the illness with his mind sponged clean, as a child wipes a slate. There was this difference, though: the slate is no more susceptible after the wiping than if nothing had ever been written upon it; his mind became *very* susceptible.

"I think, from what he told me, he must have performed prodigies of learning. He had to start from the beginning, you understand—he remembered nothing; but his mother seems to have picked just the right instructors for him. She must have been rather wonderful, too—just as I maintain that he was. He traveled through his book learning at express train speed. At thirty, he had finished college, and had served his year in a hospital. He could not have been more than forty when he came to us, and even then, I believe, he had an enviable reputation."

Jugrand nodded.

"He had it from the first. He is not of common clay with the rest of us. He is one of the immortals."

"And this in spite of the fight that never ceased for a moment," Craddock emphasized.

The artist jerked his head, impatiently.

"*What* fight? I don't understand. Loss of memory is bad enough, of course; but his mother must have told him a good deal; he must have revisited the places he had forgotten."

"She told him this—" Craddock ticked off the points on his long forefinger—"that he had been desperately ill; that it would be best for him not to try to remember."

Jugrand quietly smiled, with the enjoyment of a connoisseur in oddities. Marvin started, and his eyes rounded.

"Do you mean to say—?" he began.

Craddock inclined his head.

"He made that perfectly clear to me, as we sat there with the lamp between us. Sh told him those two things. Never anything more. He must have tried desperately to learn more. From what he implied, I think there may have been painful scenes between them. But she died without telling."

"Then he never knew who he was, where he came from—anything?" The artist fairly shot his questions.

"No."

JUGRAND spoke, deliberately choosing his words:

"I am interested in what he learned from himself—from his own mind. A man of his mentality can not have let such a matter rest. He must have employed the various expedients of psychoanalysis."

"He did. That, in fact, was the fight I referred to. He told me. Also, he took the more obvious course of trying

to find the hospital where he had been ill. But if he ever succeeded, no hospital admitted it. Possibly the right one had been enjoined to secrecy, through his mother's influence."

Craddock stopped, with the dejection of a man whose emotions weigh upon him. The others waited silently until he resumed:

"I must not go into all the details he confided. He had never disclosed his secret to anyone else, you see. When he did speak, he had forty years' silence to offset in one evening. But I can suggest this much to you, who knew him. You will agree with me that he had one of the great minds of his generation. Well, picture this man fighting desperately, with his back to the wall. Picture him in bed at night, after his day's practice. His identity—the thing he had lost which all other men had—possessed tremendous value for him. He fought for forty years, trying to recover it; and all the while, as he told me, it seemed that the key he wanted was only just beyond his reach. He believed that it appeared to him, sometimes, in dreams. He would waken just as the dreams slipped away. The thing must have become an obsession. And yet—he did his work. And then—"

"Yes?" the artist interjected, involuntarily.

"Then came the incident of two months ago. You are fairly familiar with it. He was operating; I assisting. He fainted, and I finished the operation. That was the beginning of his illness. He was more or less unconscious for the first month, and then the humiliating ending came. You know what I mean: while he was convalescing in the hospital—under the very eyes of us all—he walked out of the front door and disappeared."

"We know all that," Jugrand stated.

"Not quite all. You do *not* know that I received a letter from him. It was a bewildered, incoherent sort of letter. He must have written it on the train, and mailed it, which gave him time for what he wished to do. I was able to recover his body because of what he wrote in that letter. But there was other information in it, too. I learned from it that he had fainted at the operation because there had burst suddenly into his mind *the name of a little village in the Blue Ridge.* As soon as he was able, he escaped from the hospital and took train to that village. Near it, lying across the threshold of a ruined, charred house, I found him."

"That village was the place?" Jugrand suggested.

"I think it was the place he had been trying to recollect through forty years."

"How much besides the mere name did he remember?" pursued the psychologist.

"That, I fear, we shall never know," the surgeon answered.

Having said this, Craddock, who had been talking with a sort of forced, unnatural coherence, abruptly crumpled in his chair. His head dropped forward, and it appeared that he was about to faint. But before the others could assist him, he straightened, as suddenly as he had given way. He rose, holding to the mantel with one hand.

"I am tired," he said, simply.

He walked to the glass doors; opened them, slowly; passed into the other room. They heard his footsteps crossing the floor. The steps ceased, and there was a slight creaking sound.

Jugrand and Marvin sprang to their feet and ran to the doors. They stared for a space, in silence. It was Jugrand, at last, who took the artist by the arm and led the way back to the chairs before the fire. His heavy voice shook with excitement.

"You could see them both, in spite of the poor light?" he demanded.

Marvin nodded.

"Did you observe anything?"

The artist searched Jugrand's face for a hint of his meaning.

"I thought they looked very much alike, lying there," he said, at length.

Jugrand softly clapped his hands.

"That is it. They *are* alike! They are the same type—that sensitive, yet cold type, from which great surgeons are made. I have often thought that. I am gratified that you noticed it."

"How Craddock could lie down *there*—" The artist broke off, shuddering.

Jugrand laughed.

"It seems to you the living beside the dead—therefore bizarre. In his normal moments, it would seem so to him. Tonight, he is not normal. I am not so sure that he is even asleep—as we understand sleep. Perhaps he has been staring rather too steadily into the fire."

He went on, in a moment:

"I should like to have heard Craddock's theories. I, myself, have but one. Of course, I have suspected the truth for some time."

"What truth?" demanded Marvin.

"That this friend of ours—this dear and wonderful friend, who lies in his coffin—was suffering from loss of memory. My theory relates to the cause. That must have been an emotional catastrophe of the first order. There are only two such—love and death. Now, you will note that he never married; that he never seemed to consider the opposite sex, at all, except scientifically. That points to a subconscious inhibition—something in his original life which dried up the springs, so to speak. Maybe he had loved once, before memory left him—when he was, perhaps, eighteen or nineteen—and could not love again. There you have my theory."

Marvin was silent, staring moodily into the flames. Jugrand rose, and, walking to the glass doors, slowly pushed them open. He spoke, softly:

"The one breathes heavily, and mutters in his dreams. The other is still; he would react to no test at present available to science. Yet, if the brain cells die last of all—"

He paused to laugh—the mirthless, sardonic laugh of the enthusiast, who covers his inward fire, away from the eyes of men:

"So many 'ifs'—'if' Craddock be self-hypnotized, as I think—'if' telepathy exist, independently of our thoughts concerning it—'if' the brain cells die last—"

His voice trailed into silence. Presently, he turned to the artist.

"Come!" he commanded.

Together, the two of them passed through the doorway. They stood beside the dead man, looking down at him who slept.

Outside, the wind before the dawn was rising.

DAWN.

Dr. Craddock moaned in his sleep, struggled a little, opened his eyes. Jugrand and Marvin stood at the foot of the couch, as they had been standing, tensely, ever since they had come through the double doors. In that time, they had not spoken; but as words muttered by the sleeper had impinged upon their senses, they had looked at each other. There was that which was inexplicable in some of the words; that which Craddock, the surgeon, could not normally have dreamed.

The psychologist came forward. To do so, he had to pass between the couch and that place of more profound repose which was temporarily in the room. He laid his hand on the surgeon's forehead.

"All right, Craddock?" he inquired, softly.

The awakening man trembled, slightly.

"Yes, yes—of course," he answered. "I fell asleep; and dreamed."

The artist was about to say something, but Jugrand held up a warning finger. Craddock went on, a petulant half-sob in his voice:

"I can't understand it. I wasn't here, at all. I wasn't myself. I was. . . ."

He stopped and sat up, one long hand covering his eyes. Jugrand waited. It was very still.

Suddenly, the wind awakened. Craddock started, and rose unsteadily to his feet.

"I fear I have been very discourteous," he said, in his natural tones. "I seem to have been asleep. I must have dreamed, too."

"How much of your dream do you remember?" the psychologist asked.

The surgeon stared fixedly ahead of him. At last, he shook his head.

"None; none, whatever," he declared. "Before you questioned me, I could have sworn it was in my mind. But there is not a thing now that I can lay hold of."

His gaze wandered, and reached the face in the coffin. He advanced a few steps, and looked down, absorbedly. His pale, vivid countenance regarded one that was paler, though hardly more still; whose fire was gone.

Very gently, the psychologist touched him on the shoulder, his voice rumbling softly beneath the beating of the wind:

"You spoke at intervals in your sleep —an old man—brown smoke from a chimney—Lucia—Do you remember now?"

A shiver passed through the surgeon; a long, subtle undulation of the senses. He answered in a whisper, his gaze still bent on the unchanging features of Doctor Sawyer:

"I remember."

Jugrand's blue eyes gleamed. His voice was heavy with controlled emotion.

"Tell it!" he whispered.

His notebook was out. He drew up a chair and waited, saying no further word that might break the spell. Craddock's eyes had not left the face in the coffin. After a time, he began to talk. They did not leave it then.

Thus it was, in the far end of that strange night—in the windy dawn—that Craddock told his dream.

DOCTOR WILFORD SAWYER'S step tottered a little, as he left the train. He was a thin, tremulous old man, with eager eyes.

Though the weight of recent illness bore heavily upon him, the spirit had power to hold him to his purpose. He looked with a child's wide gaze at the village he was entering.

So far as his memory served, it was entirely unfamiliar. Yet no native could have proceeded with more apparent certainty. He barely hesitated by the railroad right-of-way, sizing up the crowd of houses huddled about the one general store, their back yards elbowing off the insistent forest; then he started forward confidently, and struck into a little zigzag path which led off among the trees.

He felt strangely buoyant. Something within him sang and shouted, so that he had to restrain himself from giving echoing expression to its exuberance. His feet, accustomed to city pavements, trod the live turf as if that were the one carpet they had always known. The trees seemed companionable; old friends, almost. When the path ran closely enough between them, he stretched out his hands to touch their trunks, one on each side, and thrilled with the feel of their shaggy bark.

Even the rapid twilight failed to shake his sense of comfortable security. He lost the path, but continued on between the trees. Night began to muffle them, but he kept on, breathlessly. Stars budded above their tops before his wanderings brought him definitely, at last, to the edge of a broad valley.

A nearly circular amphitheatre spread before him. It had been leveled of trees, but the giant forests rose, tier after tier, on the hills around it. From behind the uttermost of these hills, the moon had risen, and the nearer half of the valley's waving grass glistened in its light, though the farther portion still slept in the shadow.

The doctor gazed at this scene with an amazement which gripped him by the throat, as sometimes the first breath of ether had done, when he had hurried into an operating room, out of the cold air. The beauty and poetry of that dim landscape entered his blood. But at last his eyes broke with the subtle moonlight of the valley, and fixed themselves, instead, on that which lay in the valley's center. It was a house—a long, low mansion, of stately yet irregular design.

The place seemed entirely dark. While he stared, however, a chink of light appeared for an instant. And, as his gaze focused more precisely, he perceived a ribbon of brown smoke which twisted lazily upward in the moonlit haze, and dissolved into the background of the hills.

It may have been a moment that he stood motionless at the edge of the valley. It may have been an hour. For that space, whatever it was, he had shaken off the trammels of time. His heart was laid open, as if some super-surgeon had stolen upon him in the moonlight. He was waiting. When that which he awaited came, he felt it as a thrill within his breast, which compelled him to rush eagerly down the valley's slope, and to stop, breathless, before the door of the mansion. It moved him, then, to lift the ancient knocker, and send the echoes in a multitudinous, prying battalion down the dark hallways within.

He had sent them again before heavy footsteps responded. There was the scraping of a bar, and the sound of chains unloosing; and the door opened.

The doctor bowed, gravely, in the moonlight; and the old man in the doorway also bowed, with an even graver courtesy. He was a giant of a man, whose long, white beard and slightly bent shoulders proclaimed his years. In the yellow light of the candle he carried, his eyes gleamed with sombre vigor. Though the hand which held the candle shook, his voice was free from the cackling quality of age. It was deep and booming, rather, like the sea.

"You are welcome, sir," he said, simply after a moment's scrutiny. "Will you be pleased to enter?"

For the space of a breath, just at that instant, the doctor's sense of security failed him. He placed his hand on his heart, with the gesture of a very sick man, and began to apologize:

"I can't intrude upon you in this way, I can't—"

But the old man interrupted him, repeating:

"Be pleased to enter, sir."

With that, the thrill swept again through the doctor's soul. His pulses trembled. There was a solemn enthusiasm, very deep within him. He bowed, and stepped over the threshold.

"I will secure the door, if you will pardon me," the old man observed, punctiliously.

Having done so, he shuffled ahead into the soft, brown gloom of the hallway. They passed dark chambers on either side, into each of which the candle thrust a flitting yellow finger; but there was no other light until, still advancing, they turned into a room at the end of the passage.

The doctor paused a moment in the doorway. The thrill was beating rhythmically on his brain. He strained his eyes until they ached sharply, in an unreasonable effort to accomplish with them something which he could not have defined; but they merely registered, unforgettably, the details of the scene before him.

What he saw was a room, with a lofty, broad-beamed ceiling, and walls of shadowy paneled oak. Against the walls, in stiff attitudes, a trio of high-backed chairs stood guard. In a dark corner hid an idle spinning-wheel. A long, wooden bench stretched itself in the warmth before the fireplace—with a little, old lady sitting precisely in the middle of it. And over the whole, dividing the shadows from the mellow

glow, brooded the radiance of the crackling logs.

The old lady rose from the bench before the fire and advanced, smilingly, to meet him. She was a very ancient little dame. Her quaint, full dress might have been the fashion in the dim days of her girlhood. Her curtsey, too, retained a flavor of those days. The doctor found himself bowing even more ceremoniously than he had done for the old gentleman; and he felt that old-world formality very pleasing. It stirred no chord in his memory—the courtly old pair were strangers to him; yet, as he greeted them, something generous and glowing pulsed through his veins; something akin to that hot, soon-passing fire which is youth.

"You are late again," chided a soft voice, out of the shadows.

The doctor wheeled, suddenly. He had not seen this girl. She must have been sitting very quietly in the lee of the fireplace. She stood now in the ruddy glow, and regarded him with a pouting smile. Her eyes were deep violet, but the firelight darkened them to black. Her face was rose and ivory. As her gaze met his, her delicate under lip, which had been drawn inward with the pout, struggled into freedom; and let the smile have its way without hindrance.

"I suppose I must forgive you," she exclaimed, with a toss of her head. "Will you be pleased to sit beside me on the bench, and talk to me, sir? Waiting is weary work, you know and I have been practising it a long time."

"I must have been lost in the woods," the doctor defended, rather shamefacedly.

"*You*—lost in *these* woods?" She laughed, frankly, and, seizing his hand in her own firm little one, dragged him unresisting to the bench. There she plumped down, and took both of his hands in hers, the better to emphasize, by patting them, the fact that she was scolding him soundly.

"What will you say next? Each night you've the most ridiculous excuse in the world. Then, the very next time, you come with a worse. Don't you know, sir, that lovers should be ahead of their hour, and not tardy?"

The doctor was aware that the old couple had excused themselves. He was alone with the girl. Of other facts, however—even more obvious—he was strangely unaware. He had no feeling that the girl was speaking wildly. There was nowhere in his horizon any sense of incongruity. With the first of her words—at the mere sound of her voice—he had lost all possibility of that. The fire coursing through his veins was authentic. He was a young man. Remembering nothing, he still knew that this was the place where he should be.

"Yet I *was* lost," he insisted, obstinately.

Her eyes sobered. She leaned toward him, until her warm breath was on his cheek, and looked up into his face, with a sort of fright.

"Wilford! Do you mean to tell me you're not joking? If you're not, then you are ill; for you know these woods better than I."

"I *was* lost; but I've found myself, now!" he answered her, with an abrupt burst of gayety. "I've found myself, Lucia!"

"Did you ever lose yourself, then, silly boy?" she retorted.

It was a simple question, but it shook the doctor. His mind, which had seemed very steady, swayed a little, and he saw the girl and the room and the crackling logs through a mist. Then the steadiness returned. She was regarding him with a mischievous smile, which had, withal, something of wonder in it. He smiled back into her violet eyes, and, with sudden deftness, imprisoned the hand that had been patting his.

"Lucia!"

She was silent; but her smile became deeper. There was a hint in it, too, of wistfulness and pain.

"Tell me—" he began; then he stopped. What was it he wished her to tell him? It was perfectly natural that he should be there on the bench with her. There was no mystery in that. Yet why, then, were they so strange toward each other? They should have been chatting unrestrainedly and gaily, as they always did. No two people in the world could be more intimate than they were. He knew the white soul behind those violet eyes. He knew—

Then he began to talk. It seemed that the realization of that constraint was all he had needed. He talked; and so did she—though mostly she listened, her ivory cheeks alternately suffused with color, and pale. That which they said was chiefly expressed in tones of the voice, in glances, in subtle interchange more delicate and evanescent than words. One fragment, only, remained of their constraint: which was, that he contented himself with looking into her quickened face, and with pressing her hands between both of his.

So it grew late; and, becoming aware of familiar heavy footsteps, the doctor glanced up, to find the old gentleman smiling down at him, while the little, old lady hovered hospitably in the rear.

"I have kindled a fire in your room," the old gentleman announced, in his booming voice. "One trip up the stairs is enough for me. When you are ready, Lucia will show you there."

"He is ready now, grandfather," said the girl, rising; and, with her words, the doctor knew, suddenly, that he was, indeed, very tired.

His hand sought his heart again, and he smiled somewhat vaguely about him. Lucia lighted two candles which were on the mantel, and, giving him one, took the other, herself. He was tired; but, nevertheless, he felt unconquerably young. He responded to the stately leave-taking of the old gentleman and the old lady almost with the forced gayety of a boy bidding his elders good-night.

He followed Lucia through the doorway, her slender, whilte-clad figure tripping before him up the narrow stairs. When they reached the hallway above, broad and heavy-timbered, he walked beside her, and looked into her steady eyes; but in the flickering yellow light of the candle, she seemed unsubstantial. In spite of that evening's intimacy, there was a gulf between them. He yearned to speak, yet walked in silence.

She stopped, at length, before an open doorway near the far end of the hall, from which came the glow of a fire.

"This is your room," she said, quietly. "I hope you will sleep well, Wilford. Good-night."

He did not answer, at once. Instead, he stood in the doorway, and looked into her face. Very slowly, like a man in a dream, he advanced toward her. She trembled, but did not retreat. In the yellow circle of candle-light, she was more than ever like a figure in ivory.

He extended his arms. She leaned slightly toward him. Then an instantaneous change crossed her face. It seemed the expression of one who remembers a half-forgotten and terrible truth. She turned, with a little cry, and ran back down the passage.

He watched her candle-light, swiftly receding, until it was gone.

HE ENTERED the room, heavily; but the warm comfort of its greeting, as he looked slowly about it, revived him, and brought back something of the cheer of the evening he had spent on the bench before the fire.

It was a beautifully old-fashioned room with a four-poster bed, equally ancient, which stood at right angles to the wall on one side of the crackling fireplace. On the other was an oaken wardrobe, with a top higher than the doctor could reach. He essayed the feat, in youthful exuberance, and paid for it the next moment when he sank down upon the bed, hand on heart. The dis-

comfort was quickly gone, however, and he rose to look out of the broad-silled window at the valley below.

The grass waved and glistened in the moonlight. In the distance, the circle of woods enclosed it, like a dark horizon line. The moon had mounted higher, but its slanting rays were not yet entering his chamber. No living thing moved within sight. The quiet of the scene increased the drowsiness of which he had hardly been aware, so that he found it hard to keep awake until his sleepy fingers had performed their task of undressing, and he was in bed.

Strangely, however, he did not fall asleep. Instead, he lay with utter restfulness, watching the dance of firelight and shadows on the high ceiling. He was conscious of the slow approach of the moonlight, through the window. He was gratefully aware of the dark woods outside, the waving grass. . . .

His mind smoothed itself out. Emotion left him. Awake, tolerantly receptive of whatever might come, he seemed to himself at the pinnacle of the years, with life graciously falling away on either side. For the first time, it might have been said of the doctor that his mind was free. Nothing tapped at its door.

Gently, and with infinite gradation, then, into that free mind came memory—memory without emotion; memory which he had prayed and struggled for, in bitter night watches, but which he now received with calmness.

He knew this valley. Of course, he knew it. He had been a boy, not far from here. On his way to the village, he had passed regularly through the valley, had stopped at this house, had even spent the night here, many times. Surely, there was nothing in his after life as familiar as this place! It was curious—but he thought this apathetically—that he should not have remembered it until now.

That was as far as his mind would go, for the time. It pieced together a thousand incidents of his boyhood, and made them more real than the trees or the moonlight. It made them vivid, but declined to go beyond them. Instead, it took a prodigious jump, and began to associate itself with his later life—the life he had remembered all along.

Yet in this memonic chamber there was a difference, too. He discovered within himself an astonishing new facility at pushing out its walls. His recollections had never extended to the days prior to his second school life. Now, he was able to proceed farther. He saw himself undergoing insistent coaching, at the hands of expert professors, until, bit by bit, his early education was reestablished, though memory of early things had not come with it.

He made an effort—his mind seemed astonishingly acrobatic—and remembered long days and nights in a hospital, where he had been not a doctor but a patient. They were vague days and nights, merging on the nearer side into his phase of education, on the other, dwindling off into obscurity. No effort of his could bring light into that obscurity; but within it, at first dimly, then with sharper definition as he came into charted waters, he could see his mother's face.

He saw it there, not with the expression of mingled pain and triumph it had worn in later years, but struggling, struggling. . . .

He spent freely of that restful period, between sleep and waking, in fascinated observance of her face; watching its incessant battling, as it fought its way through misery and despair to ultimate victory. He knew the battle had been for him, but why he could not tell. In one flash of vivid vision, he saw himself coping terrifically with the specter of insanity. He saw marching columns of dead men—ancestors of his, who had lived bravely—coming to fight by his side. They were conjured up by his mother, who agonized with him on her knees at his bedside.

He saw them, and knew that with their aid—with *her* aid—he had won; but these were his Pillars of Hercules on that side. He could not see beyond them.

There was a little period when he lay, with dulling thoughts, almost asleep. He shut his eyes, and communed pleasantly with his mind. He opened them to find his memory back at the boyhood days, working forward from the place where it had left him before.

Suddenly, emotion came with it—hot, palpitating emotion. Lucia! How could he have forgotten her for an instant? He sat up in bed, and stared about the room. This was the house. She had come to live with her grandparents. He had met her here.

Then, one after another, like silver bells, they returned to him: the hours he had spent with her. Nothing was omitted; her lightest words were not too trifling to be remembered. They came back with the brilliance of summer days, the glamour of moonlit nights. He recalled the very trees they had walked among. He remembered a path, back of the house, which they had used. Had there been more light, he could have found it then. He determined to look for it in the morning.

Once, he laughed aloud, when, recollecting a tall pine which had been a landmark with them, he saw its top through the window against the sky, towering above the black line of trees. Nothing was lost; nothing. The past was all his. There was one night, one lovely night. . . .

The vision ceased, and sleep came, like the snapping of a thread; but with it, dreams. They were vague, confused dreams, shot through with mystery. His sense of restfulness was gone. It was replaced by a murky foreboding.

Something began calling him, from far away; something terrible, though remote. It approached, with marching footsteps. He, too, was advancing, through the corridors of sleep to meet it. He struggled as he went, and averted his face. He awoke, at last, with the sweat of a chill horror upon him.

There was no transition stage. He was broad awake, at once—awake, and an old man again. He was an old man, whose bones ached, and he was staring, with eyes heavy with terror, at an incredible thing.

Moonlight flooded the room. It came through a great gap in the roof. There was no fire in the fireplace, no tapestry on the wall. The wardrobe doors had fallen from rusty hinges. He straightened painfully on one elbow, to find that the bed on which he had been lying was little more than a frame, spanned by worm-eaten slats. A tarnished candlestick, without a candle, stood on the mantel. *The room was in ruins.*

HALF-BLINDED by the staggering horror which enveloped him, he stumbled into his clothes and groped his way to the door. Though he had bolted it before going to bed, it was open, hanging from one hinge.

The moonlight entered the hall, for most of the roof was gone. Somehow, with great jumps down the broken stairway, he reached the lower floor, and his steps brought him to the room where the two of them had spent their pleasant evening.

The moon shone here, too. It showed him a ruined fireplace, a stone floor, four blackened walls.

For a moment, his eyes wandered to and fro, regarding the room with nightmare fascination; then he turned, mechanically, and walked down the ruinous hall, through the crumbling doorway, into the valley. He knew this for reality. He had come, the night before to this burned house; he had sat on that remnant of a bench, before that cold fireplace; he had lain, and felt that

(Continued on page 95)

The Cauldron

True Adventures of Terror

CONDUCTED BY
PRESTON LANGLEY HICKEY

WHILE most of the material in WEIRD TALES is, of course, fiction, we are of the belief that there are innumerable persons who have lived through experiences as weird, terrible and horrifying as anything ever chronicled by a fictionist. This belief, and the fact that WEIRD TALES deals exclusively with the bizarre and unusual, has resulted in the establishment of THE CAULDRON.

Readers who have had a hand in strange adventures, or who have been victims of experiences of a startling and terrifying nature, are cordially invited to send accounts of them to THE CAULDRON. A concrete idea of what is desired may be ascertained by reading this month's contributions. Manuscripts may be as horrible and hair-raising as it is in the power of the author to make them, but they must be clean from a moral standpoint. Those accepted will be paid for at our usual rate. Tell your story clearly and briefly. Double-spaced, typewritten manuscripts are preferred, but those in long hand will be considered if legibly written. No manuscript will be returned unless accompanied by a stamped and self addressed envelope.

THE LESSON IN ANATOMY

THE old Moritz House in the Hague was occupied, ages ago, by a man of royal birth, named Prince Moritz. The tale runs that one year in the late sixteen hundreds, when Holland was heavily oppressed by the Spaniards, a band of Dutch youths, having attacked an officer of the enemy, sought refuge in this house. The prince concealed them in an upper chamber, and upon being ordered to surrender them, nobly refused to do so, insisting that they were nowhere to be found within his property.

Breaking through the doors, the Spanish searched the place and found the "protestant dogs" in the chamber mentioned, where they slaughtered them, fourteen in all, in a most brutal manner. The prince, who was an old man, changed his residence immediately and died, shortly after, from grief.

The tale bears no connection to my story, but is merely a bit of history relating to the house, which should impress it upon the reader's mind as a place grown-over with mystery and legend.

Soon after the prince's death, the house was converted into a museum for paintings, and in the so-called slaughter room was hung Rembrandt's famous "*Lesson in Anatomy.*"

The picture is given the room to itself. In front of it are benches upon which lovers of fine art may rest themselves and gaze upon the canvas. Rembrandt specialized in portrait paintings. In his faces are the most vivid expressions of interest, love, horror, wonder or fear; and there is a depth to his eyes that is haunting.

The "Lesson in Anatomy," represents seven medical students with keen, interested faces, bending over a table upon which lies a human body, unclothed and with one of its arms dissected to show the muscles. An instructor stands pointing his scissors to something about the arm, and lecturing to the students. The room in which the lesson takes place is darkened and from somewhere above, a pale yellow light falls upon the corpse.

I was fascinated the moment I saw the thing, and I sat spellbound for more than an hour, gazing at it. When, at length, I departed, its influence was so upon me that I could think of nothing else.

"I must return," I thought, "and see that picture once more before I leave." (I was only passing through the city.)

Accordingly, toward evening I set out for the museum. Knowing that it closed at seven o'clock, I quickened my steps, but arrived just as the guardian was locking the doors.

I pleaded that I might be allowed just another glimpse of the work, but the fellow was obstinate and, turning his key, departed. Waiting until he had disappeared in the dusk, I tried the door but found it to be as firm as he. There were, however, casements, one on either side. I tried them both. The one held against me, but the other—as I pressed it—gave way; and thus I stole into the hall.

It was growing so dark that soon I would be unable to see the object of my visit. I am not a prey to superstition, but as I climbed the steps, listening to them creak and echo through the galleries, such a feeling as I had never had crept over me. I felt strangely desolate and lonely. It seemed queer, moreover, as I reflected upon it, that I had been impelled to revisit the picture at this hour. My heart beat audibly. Softly tip-toeing, I approached the door. Summoning all my courage, I placed my hand on the knob, and swung it open. I paused——.

How long I stood thus in the doorway, I know not. It was probably until the supernatural force that had gripped me at the moment of my entrance, drew me on. As in a dream, I advanced. The light upon the corpse was so intensified that it confined itself no longer to the canvas, but spread about the room, illuminating the very walls and benches. Such a depth had grown in the picture that it resembled a stage, with the students and their grim instructor standing forth as actors.

I was horrified, as I drew near, to find their eyes fixed upon me. I stopped at the foremost bench and seated myself. For some time then they gazed at me in silence, and I at them, until at last the professor whispered a word that turned them to their work.

Occasionally they spoke to each other in hollow voices that were distant-sounding and almost inaudible; once one of them bent forward and turned the page of a text-book lying at the feet of the dead man. My brain reeled and my eyes grew dim. A peculiar numbness was robbing my limbs of their life. I saw that the corpse was being removed, and the table made clear, and at the same time I felt myself being lifted!

Gently I was laid upon the table. A drowsy sensation embraced me, and I knew that soon I would be totally unconscious. Forcing my eyes open for an instant, for I had held them closed, I saw the instructor approaching *my* arm with his knife! As it touched my flesh, I screamed and tried to beat him back. Then a great sea of blackness welled over me, and enveloped my consciousness.

Next morning they found me lying there on the floor, at the foot of the picture, with my clothing sadly ruffled, and with a gash in my arm that ached severely. There have been many explanations advanced concerning my remarkable experience, but it still remains a mystery.

JOHN R. PALMER.

THE BLACK NUN

SHORTLY after the Civil War my husband was appointed to a federal position in the capital city of one of the southern states. Owing to housing difficulties, we were obliged to rent the residence of the state prison warden, a bachelor, who reserved one room.

The old penitentiary house was a high, narrow, dingy-brown structure overlooking the prison yard. From its left-hand upper windows one could see all that went on in the yard—including an occasional hanging. My shades were always drawn on those occasions.

One evening soon after our arrival, James and I sat in the rather pleasant living-room. I was knitting a gray shawl for Mother, and James was reading a pamphlet about the work of the freemen's aid.

Suddenly I felt the presence of someone back of my chair. Involuntarily, I glanced toward James who was still deep in his reading. Hastily looking around, I was amazed to see a tall, black-robed nun passing into the next room.

My cry aroused James, who also perceived our visitor. We followed her quietly through several rooms to the kitchen door, through which she suddenly disappeared. Up to this point we had considered her an intruder; but the fact that both front and back doors were locked and she made her exit through the rear door without opening it amazed us.

That night I was aroused from my sleeep by the sound of sawing; not a particularly alarming sound, even at that hour of the

night. Nevertheless, it made me very nervous, and I wondered it did not wake James.

In the morning he made light of my fears, and indeed they did seem ridiculous in the salutary light of the sun.

But for days the Black Nun haunted me. I would sit down to read and, suddenly looking up from my book, would see her beside me; I would go to my room and find her standing by my bed; I would look in the glass and her pale, sweet face would be reflected in the mirror. I feared that I was going insane, yet would not see a doctor lest he confirm my fears. James, who never saw the Black Nun but the once, insisted that we were dreaming.

The constant presence of the Black Nun, the continued nightly sawing, and my utter isolation—for no white woman would make a friend of a hated "Yankee"—made life unbearable. Finally I asked Mother to make us a long visit.

My mother was a "medium"; she often received "spirit" messages through automatic writing, and she occasionally heard rappings and other sounds for which there seemed to be no material explanations. She was the last woman in the world to fear a ghost.

The morning after her arrival she looked tired and unrefreshed. Each succeeding morning for a week she looked worse, and then she packed her trunk, declaring her intention of going home. Hesitatingly—for I had hitherto avoided the topic—I mentioned the Black Nun.

"It isn't what I've seen," exclaimed Mother. "It's what I've heard and felt. It's driving me crazy."

"Did you hear the sawing?" I ventured.

"Sawing? No, it was the rustling—and the whispering—and the moaning—and hands laid on my forehead, cool hands—you know how hands feel when you've a fever—and hands patting the pillow—and hands feeling my wrists—it was dreadful—and I'm going to get out of this house today, and I advise you to do the same."

But James and I couldn't camp out in the street—so I had to stay.

In time the neighbors grew friendly. Ladies began to call at the Old Penitentiary House. I shall never forget Mrs. Willing, the first who came.

"This isn't my first visit here," she informed me. "I was at the house often during the war. It was a hospital then, you know."

A hospital. And Mother had spoken of moanings, and cool hands laid on her forehead.

"It was in charge of a nursing sisterhood," continued Mrs. Willing.

There was the Black Nun—and Mother had heard rustlings as of voluminous robes.

"There was a romantic story connected with the hospital," my caller went on. "It seems that about ten years before the war a lovely Creole girl was betrothed to a young man of this city. They quarrelled—and he joined the army, she a nursing order. The war brought both of them to this house, he as a patient, she as a nurse. They met, they found that they still loved each other—and it was forever too late. Well, the young man died, and Sister Theresa, when she heard them sawing the boards for his coffin—there was a coffin-maker's shop in the back yard—went quite mad, and died a week later. Sad, wasn't t?"

So ended the tory of the Black Nun. I have never been able to account for her appearance, although I have read many theories explaining "ghosts"; but I do know that I saw her as plainly as ever I saw anyone in my life.

H. F. K.

THE PHANTOM TRAIN

THOUGH I am not in the least superstitious, still I have had good cause to be as the result of a strange occurrence I witnessed about twenty-five years ago and which I will relate here.

This "apparition," if I might so call it, was also seen by many persons besides myself, and many of them have expressed their opinions as to its cause, yet I have never heard any convincing explanation.

At that time I was a boy in my early 'teens and always spent my summer holidays with an uncle who was station agent on a small branch of a Canadian railway. This branch, after switching off from the main road, was laid over a swampy waste on which there was very little vegetation except spongy moss, long faded grass, and occasionally a few clusters of decayed trees. At the end of this swamp there was a river, spanned by a high bridge, on the other side of which my uncle's station was situated.

A small village, back in the mountains, was located about fifteen miles from here, and a little old-fashioned train would run up there about three times a week for the accommodation of passengers, mostly farmers, residing in the village and district.

One summer, as I traveled out from town to visit my uncle, the train stopped at a switch to take on a few box-cars. On this particular day the brakeman had great difficulty in coupling the cars to the train. In fact, he failed four or five times, and this aroused the anger of the engineer, a man of quick temper and picturesque vocabulary.

Contrary to rules, he got down from the cab of the engine, leaving the fireman in charge of the throttle and rushed down to the uncoupled cars. Yelling to the fireman to back the train up, he stepped in to make the couplings himself, tripped, and, before he could escape, was caught between the couplings.

Strange to say, he did not lose consciousness immediately although he was fatally injured. He raged and swore and with many an oath declared he would run that train again even if he was in hell. Three minutes later he died.

About eleven o'clock one night, a week after this gruesome accident, I was sitting reading near a window at the station, when the gleam of an engine's headlight caught my eye. It was coming toward the station through the swamp and I thought I had better let my uncle know about it, as it was his duty to report all trains that passed. He was greatly surprised, however, when I told him and said that it must be a special as no train was due that night.

Peering out into the night, we both watched the train slowly approaching. A full moon had just risen, and cast a silvery lustre over the landscape, heightened here and there where it glinted upon small ponds.

The headlight came steadily on and, upon rounding a bend, we could see the lights shining through the car windows. It looked like an ordinary passenger train as it appears at night, but there was a strange vagueness in its outlines, and it appeared to float rather than roll over the tracks. This, however, did not occur to me until afterwards.

On and on it came, nearer and nearer to the bridge, and with a dull, thundering noise went a short way over it and then, like a flash—disappeared into thin air.

I cannot describe the utter awe that overwhelmed me at this instant upon beholding what I then thought to be a great tragedy. A picture of demolished cars, shapeless masses of twisted steel and scores of dead and injured passengers flashed through my mind and filled me with horror. I thought the train had plunged down upon the jagged rocks and into the swirling waters of the river.

My uncle hastily lighted a lantern, and we ran over to the bridge expecting to see a horrible sight, but only the stillness of the night, broken by the splash of the river against the shore greeted us. We were convinced that what we had seen had been some kind of a phantom.

The next day we questioned people who were living in the vicinity. Many of them declared that they had seen a train passing at the time we saw the strange manifestation, but had failed to see it crossing the bridge. They were greatly surprised when we told of its disappearance.

After this the "Phantom Train," as it came to be called, was seen many times, and for a period of nearly five years it appeared at intervals, but always dissolved into nothingness at the bridge. It has been almost eighteen years now since the "Phantom Train" made its last ghostly, nocturnal pilgrimage, and this branch of the railway has been in disuse for years on account of the bridge being pronounced unsafe for the modern heavy steel train.

The spectral mystery is still unsolved and has passed into legend, but it shall always live in my memory as the strangest thing I have ever seen.

The dead engineer had apparently kept his word.

CHARLES WHITE.

A STRANGE MANIFESTATION

SINCE the war, thousands of persons have taken a great interest in everything directly connected with or pertaining to the occult. Many have become fanatics on the subject.

Believing that it might be of interest to readers of The Cauldron to have the particulars of an authentic occurrence, I am submitting a short account of a strange manifestation that actually happened to me. The inexplicable incident I have to tell, occurred in Cleveland, Ohio, some years ago.

I was on my way to Detroit, and decided to go by boat from Cleveland. I arrived by train in that city in the evening and engaged a room for the night in an unpretentious house on a quiet street. Leaving my suitcase, I strolled off to see the town, had tea, went to a movie and returned about 10:30 p. m.

My room was on an upper floor. There were two other tenants who occupied the adjoining room. Aside from these, there was only a small parlor—the door of which was always open—on that floor. A gas light burned on the landing outside my door, and gave light to the staircase, which was a single flight and led down to the small entrance hall. I noticed that the door was without a key.

"My wife has gone to bed," the proprietor said, "and I don't know where she has put the key, but you will not be disturbed. The young men have been asleep a long time now, and there is no one else in the house but my wife and I, with the exception of yourself."

Assuring him that everything was highly satisfactory, I bade him good night, and he withdrew.

The bed was against the side of the room, with a window near the head, and the door at the foot. There were the usual furnishings; bureau, wash-stand and so forth. I placed a

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THE EYRIE

EVERYBODY, it seems, enjoys a weird tale—or almost everybody. At any rate, it is not a matter of schooling, or literary cultivation, or position in life, or peculiarity of mind.

Nor yet is it a matter of age. Old or young, people like such stories. It's a deep-rooted liking, as old as life itself.

We are persuaded to utter these commonplace thoughts by four or five letters to the Editor, now lying before us. These letters indicate that a man of eighty can be as pleasurably thrilled by weird fiction as a girl of eleven or a boy of fourteen.

Let us, f'r'instance, examine this epistle from Ernest Hollenbeck of Davison, Michigan:

"Howdy, Son!" (says he). "Beautiful morning. California has nothing on old Michigan this lovely day. Davison is a charming rural village this week—attractive to look upon. . . .

"Yesterday being a holiday, and my seventy-seventh birthday as well, I amused myself by writing the enclosed short story, 'A Cruel Mystery.' Finished at 12 noon. I was seventy-seven at 11 a. m. Copied it, finishing at 4.45 p. m. Almost no changes from first sketch. That isn't such a rotten stunt for a kid almost four-score—not from my angle at least.

"I'm alone in the world, absolutely. Do my own housework. Make a living by hard manual knocks. Pay rent. Fight ill health. Keep tab on the old lads who are deserting to the Great Enemy. A lot of them this spring. Day before yesterday I attended the funeral of the last of my teachers, so far as I know. We were close friends all those years. I miss him sadly.

"I do so wish you to read carefully, critically and kindly the story that I wrote for you especially on my seventy-seventh birthday, finished at my natal hour. It has some unusual situations, I assure you. I am conceited enough to think that you have few stories that match this one in the unusual."

And now let us consider the next one, which comes from Eleanor Gause of 451 Melrose Street, Chicago:

"Dear Mr. Spook Baird: I am a new member of the WEIRD TALES family. Imagine an eleven-year-old girl reading stories like yours! My mother has been wondering why, day after day, I'm so good. I'll tell you why—I'm afraid the spooks will get me!

"I must give my criticism of your stories. The spookiest were 'The Evening Wolves,' 'Osiris,' 'The Moon Terror,' 'The Gray Death,' which had me all upset, and 'The Invisible Terror' and 'The Madman.' Burrr! They were all so spooky!

"The first copy I got was April's, then May's, and then June's, and I can hardly wait for July's. I was very upset about 'The Whispering Thing,' but it disappointed me at the end. I'm so sorry.

"Well, Mr. Baird, if I don't stop writing about WEIRD TALES I will go into hysterics. But I promise to read it every month.

"P. S. I'm a writer by birth, so I'm bound to write a mystery story for your magazine. . . . Please write soon to an anxious little girl, eleven years and eight months, born October 15, 1911."

And in between those two extremes we have letters here from readers of almost every age and from almost every walk in life—all of which, we think, helps to establish our point that EVERYBODY likes a weird tale.

On the chance that somebody, besides ourselves, may be interested in what the youngsters think of WEIRD TALES, we submit two more juvenile letters:

"Dear Mr. Baird: I am a boy fourteen years old, and I like WEIRD TALES very much. I was delighted when I saw the first issue of your magazine at my newsdealer's, and I am sure that your magazine will succeed. Like 'H .W.' of Sterling, Ill., I like stories of this kind.

"In the April issue I liked 'The Parlor Cemetery,' 'The Hall of the Dead,' and 'The Conquering Will.' In fact, all were good. I like 'spooky' stories, and I hope you will have more of them in the future.

"If 'H. W.' sues your magazine for the condition of his eyes I'll pay the damages."—Richard Jenkins, 1018 Fourth Street, North Catasauqua, Pa.

"Gentlemen: I have read both issues of WEIRD TALES, and both my mother and I like it very well, and will continue to buy it as long as it is published."—Jack Bohn, eleven years of age, Alexander Hamilton High School, Oakland, Cal.

We have several more such letters from boys and girls in their 'teens, but we'll put these aside for the moment and turn to those from the "grown-ups."

HERE'S a radiant burst of words from A. L. Mattison of Dallas, Texas, that may (or may not) interest you:

"EUREKA!

"'Why the exclamation?' you ask.

"That was the animated expression of Ponce de Leon and his followers when they set foot on the shore of a new world: 'Eureka! We have found it!'

"Hence, I repeat: 'Eureka! I have found it!'

"'Found what?' you may question again.

"Why, I've found WEIRD TALES, the magazine I have heretofore looked for in vain. A magazine of abundance and variety. I have just read Vol. 1, No. 1, and must express my feelings. I have just risen from a festal board, my hunger satisfied, for I found so many and such a variety of dishes from which to select appetising food.

"I did not relish all the dishes on WEIRD TALES' well-spread table, but I have no kick coming. No doubt other feasters enjoyed those dishes which I passed up, while devouring with relish those not appealing to their taste. This is a populous world, filled with people whose tastes are as various as the hues of the rainbow. All must be fed. And when they sit at WEIRD TALES' bounteous board all may find that which their mental

appetites crave, even though they leave some dishes untouched. . . .

"Too many caterers (editors) give us potatoes alone, though in different forms: fried, boiled, stewed, baked, mashed and whole, with various seasonings, yet, all potatoes and we soon tire of the diet. We want variety.

"The story is what readers want, not pages of superfluous, flowery rhetoric. Often I am compelled to wade through the tortuous and winding paths of fourteen pages of a jungle of unnecessary words, phrases and paragraphs, compelled to stop and watch the author gather wild flowers, smell and comment on them, and raise his eyes heavenward to elucidate on the softness of the azure skies and describe the picturesque clouds weaving themselves into fantastic and beautiful figures, until my grip on the story is lost; its trail gets cold, and I am not sure whether I'm perusing a story or an essay on nature. Often I become weary of pursuing that elusive story and give up the chase, leaving the author spinning pages of, to him, beautiful and lofty rhetoric, forgetting the story which in the end is not worth the time and energy expended in running it down.

"If an author has a story to write, a real story, it grips and holds him with such interest that he has no time to linger along the wayside gathering wild flowers and indulging his mind in lofty flights. I can't understand why he does it unless he feels that he has some particular editor cinched and is sure of his one cent per word. If that is the case he buncoes that poor editor. He is giving him what would constitute one little drink of 'Old Scotch' with so much water added that his 'Scotch' is spoiled. Fourteen pages of good paper is wasted in padding and expanding a little story that could have been better told in four or six pages.

"And, Mr. Baird, give us variety, not only the uncanny and grewsome, weird and fantastic, but give us a sprinkling of short, surprising and humorous stories, something droll and out of the ordinary; some of your many readers will lick the dish clean and beg for more. All the real short stories contained in WEIRD TALES were good, undiluted 'Old Scotch,' minus water.

"I once joked a friend for drinking four cups of coffee, and he answered: 'No, you are mistaken. I did not drink four cups of coffee. I drank four cups of water in order to get one cup of coffee.' A good thought, well expressed, and your short stories brought his words to mind; I felt that I had only to drink one in order to get a full cup of coffee.

"When I read your editorial, 'The Eyrie,' I said to myself, 'That editor is a man, with the mentality of an adult. These pages were not written by an incompetent babe, but by a man who realizes the literary needs of those who read all classes of fiction.'

"You are on the right track, Mr. Baird; you have the right idea. Go to it and make WEIRD TALES a magazine for the millions, one of which they will never tire because they will find variety, anything and everything good. Spread a feast each month to attract and hold patrons tired of the wishy-washy stuff found on other boards. LUCK TO YOU!"

Our next letter, though not so rich in metaphor, is no less enthusiastic. It was written by Abe Yochelson of 1010 Blue Island Avenue, Chicago, thus:

"Dear Mr. Baird: Have just finished reading your May issue of WEIRD TALES and am writing to let you know I am from now on one of your biggest boosters. Passing by a book store, I saw an entirely new magazine and in big red letters, WEIRD TALES. The name appealed to me instantly, and as I work till 8 p. m. I started to read at 9:30 p. m. in bed and finished at exactly 12 o'clock midnight. My hair stood up, pointing to the ceiling, there was a big lump in my throat, and shivers ran up and down my spine.

"When I was in the climax of 'The Haunters and the Haunted' my dog, seeing my light burning, scratched on the door and the door opened. Believe me, if I could have found my voice I would have screamed, although I am seventeen years old.

"Everything is brought out so realistically, and although I get 'Science and Invention' monthly for its stories of the end of the world, your story, 'The Moon Terror,' beats 'em all hollow.

"P. S. I have just bought the June number and am eagerly starting part two of 'The Moon Terror.' It is a very scientific piece of authorship."

THERE is at least one household in Chicago upon which our magazine has happily exerted a salutary influence. In witness thereof we offer the following:

"Dear sir: I have just finished reading the May copy of WEIRD TALES and am writing to let you know what a hair-raising and thrilling book it is. I started to read the book in bed and when I finished 'The Floor Above' and 'The Purple Heart' I was too scared to get up and put the light out, so I woke my husband and he put it out, and—Good Lord! how awful it is to have a good imagination, for as soon as the light went out I saw purple hearts glow all over the room.

"So I cuddled close to my husband and closed my eyes tight, and finally managed to go to sleep. Now I put a candle beside my bed, and read until I get too scared to finish the story, or too scared to start another.

"Please make WEIRD TALES come out twice a month, because I can't wait for the next copy. I enclose fifty cents for the March and April numbers. Please send them as soon as possible.

"WEIRD TALES can surely make your hair stand up and chills go up and down your back. I used to run off to shows by myself, but now I go with my husband."
—Mrs. Walter Jackowiec, 1637 West Nineteenth Street.

Henry W. Whitehill of 1633 Linden Avenue, Oakland, California, offers some helpful hints, likewise some pleasant praise, in the following communication:

"Dear Sir: Let me be one of the many who extend thanks and 'congrats' for the new magazine. It certainly does fill a void which has been aching for many a day. I believe you have shown not only courage in producing it but a real understanding of the wants of the reading public.

'Everybody and his sister-in-law loves a 'spooky' story once in a while. Witness the tales that are told around the stove or at the picnic when dark has fallen. And good ones are reread and retold many times. We like to be boosted out of the ordinary and realistic now and then, and have those nerves which the usual tale does not affect thrilled by a tale of the extraordinary and unusual. But rarely do we find such a story except in the 'complete editions'! If we feel the want of a tonic shiver we must go to the shelves and consult old Doc Poe, or O'Brien, or Bierce, et al.

"One popular magazine does publish a so-called out-of-the-ordinary story at intervals, but most of them are filled with more gore and thunder than gooseflesh.

"And most of us like to tell or write one once in a while. When such an incident does attack our imaginations it clamors for the telling. But if it is written it may go the rounds of personal friends, but rarely finds utterance in print unless one has reached the dignity of a 'complete and definitive,' which most of us rarely hope to attain. So that to the tellers as well as the listeners you are a godsend.

"As a reader, I have two little criticisms to utter—and one will cure itself in time. The first is that your introductory squibs are prone to be somewhat exaggerated, deal a bit too strongly with superlatives. Not all tales can live up to the promise, and it is better, I think, to be pleasantly disappointed by the tale turning out better than the promise than unpleasantly through its failing to live up to it. Think it over.

"The second is that there is apt to be monotony unless extreme care is given to the selection of the contents so that interest may be varied. Too many spook or psychic tales in one number, or several of the same type, are apt to give one supernatural dyspepsia. I am sure this will correct itself when the contents of the 'safe' has grown so that you have a larger supply on hand to select from."

AND then, again, we get one like this:

"Dear Mr. Baird: There's no use my trying to tell you how fine your magazine is. Words simply fail me. But what I want is more stories like 'The Moon Terror' and 'A Square of Canvas,' two of the best stories I ever read.

"Look out! Here comes a couple of bricks: Make your magazine like the first and second copies, smaller in size. PLEASE! They're a lot more handier, and I bet the readers would prefer that size. Why not take a vote on it?

"And those covers! They scare more than one person out of buying a copy. If I didn't know what WEIRD TALES was like, I would never buy a copy from the looks of the cover.

"This wouldn't look good in print, of course, but I have to say it."—Weird Tales Fan, Jr., Houghton, Mich.

We're glad you said it, anyway, W. T. F., Jr., and we're happy to put it in print. With regard to those bricks: We, too, believe that our covers have not been what they should have been, and we're trying to improve them. We think we've made some improvement on the cover of the present issue, and we hope to do still better next time.

As for the new size—Well, there's considerable difference of opinion here. We're constantly getting letters from our readers expressing a pronounced liking or disliking for the size of W. T., and those who like our present size are just as vigorous in saying so as those who don't. For example, take this letter from Charles Pracht of Springfield, Missouri:

"Dear sir: I can't help but let you know how much I enjoy your magazine, WEIRD TALES. I think it is a waste of time and one's life to read poor stuff. Out of the whole bunch of magazines on the market WEIRD TALES is the only one in which I read every word of reading matter and enjoy it.

"I consider myself very fortunate in stumbling onto your first number. I have read number two, and am now reading the third (May) number. This is the best yet.

"I like the shape, 9 x 12, because when I open it it lays flat and I can read to my heart's content and don't have to turn a page every few minutes.

"I prefer stories along spiritualistic lines. Can't think of anything to improve your magazine. It is about perfect."

Thus it goes; and you may "roll your own." We will, of course, take a vote on the question, as "Fan" suggests—if enough of our readers are sufficiently interested to express their views.

Meanwhile, we shall inspect this good letter from W. C. Young of Wilmington, Delaware:

"Dear sir: Did you ever feel as though something had been made especially for you? You have? Sta' bueno! Then you can realize how I felt when I had finished several stories in WEIRD TALES. All of them had an ending different from the stories one reads nowadays. I have always found that a story with a tragic end was one that would cling to you for many days. I have always liked things which are out of the ordinary.

"I was busy on a novelette when I purchased the March issue of WEIRD TALES. I saw that it was something new, and, like the others, I bought it just to get your address and find out, first hand, the type of stories you prefer. In glancing through it, I stopped to read 'The Closing Hand,' and the story was so compelling that—damn it!—I forgot that I had ever started that novelette.

"I finished 'The Thing of a Thousand Shapes' a few minutes ago, and now I am impatient for the April issue so that I can wholly finish it. I'd subscribe for WEIRD TALES, only I never know from one month to another where I shall be. I am a bit of a nomad."

Good, too (to us, anyway), is the following from John Richards of 2410 Twenty-fourth Street, Niagara Falls, New York:

"Dear Editor: The other day I happened to be in a book store. Looking at the magazines, I saw a black-covered book. I picked up the magazine and saw the name, WEIRD TALES, on the cover. This being a new magazine to me, I started to read 'The Bodymaster.'

"I bought the magazine then and there, and walked home at a fast gait, for 'The Bodymaster' was a great story. Needless to say, I stayed up till I had read every story and 'The Eyrie' by The Editor. I am now a WEIRD TALES fan, and from now on it is 'my' magazine. I can hardly wait till May to finish 'The Whispering Thing.'

"When I was in the store the night I bought the magazine there were about fifteen copies. When I went there this morning 'the cupboard was bare.' This in itself shows the popularity of your magazine."

Just for a change (we dread the thought of waxing tiresome), we must let you see a slam or two:

"Ah, Mr. Baird, and woe is me! Number 3 WEIRD TALES is a disappointment. It hardly conformed to the promise of Numbers 1 and 2. Where was the weirdness of Number 3? You reprinted old 'Pappy' Bulwer's ridiculous ghost bunk over which our ancestors laughed, the fathers guffawing, the mothers giggling, at his frantic and most amusing attempts to be awfully terrorizing! Never was spook story so overdone.

"As for 'The Devil Tree'—why, the whole world has read Poe's 'Cask of Amontillado,' and, anyway, that tree appeared long ago in a Strand Magazine story. Oh, pray ride not such old junk to death double; And O! the most lame and impotent conclusion to what in the April number promised thrills—'The Whispering Thing'! Were all the men in that story as blind as the 'toxicised' bat (!) that the flying vampyre was invisible to their mortal eyes? A most mysterious Borgian—poison plastered on the bat's wings! O, my! O, piffle! Sherlock Holmes, take a back seat in the presence of that remarkable detective from that dear France! Nothing new under the sun? 'Tis ever so! Yet, why not place all of the myriad suggestions and attempted stories in the Baalam Box, then sort 'em out, correct bad grammar, spelling, etc., then, after dressing up the original garbage, turn out a good, genuine story of the weird! Well, better luck to June, and success to you!"—H. M., N. Y. City.

"P. S. Weird stories must at times be shy, of course, and I fancy it is not easy to live up invariably to the weird promise. Criticism you must abide, but comfort yourself that even Homer did nod betimes. Your new form of the magazine is fine. It is a most acceptable departure. But, do what you may, weird yarns are not so common that you can appear weekly, or even biweekly, methinks. Just make these impatient fellers wait the full month for their feast of thrills, and we wait in hope that June shall retrieve the shortcomings of May.

"P. S. No. 2. I read the whole No. 3 from 8 p. m. to 1 a. m., for, poor as it was, May could not be laid aside until finished! Is that a good sign? Yea, verily!"

We haven't, as yet, heard what H. M. thought of our June issue: Can it be that he, after reading it, was paralyzed with disappointment? Oh, well—

Here's the other one:

"Dear Mr. Baird: Just a line to tell you how much I enjoyed reading WEIRD TALES. I don't write many letters to editors, but since you publish some I thought I would tell you about the stories I liked.

"The first part of the 'Moon Terror' by A. G. Birch was a dandy, but I didn't think so much of the last half. 'The Well' by Julian Kilman was excellent reading. I thoroughly enjoy his stuff. 'The Phantom Wolfhound' was fairly well written, but mighty unconvincing. 'The Man the Law Forgot' was well done, thrilling, and interesting, but the article in the same issue by Dr. Mereness gave it the lie. 'The Gray Death' and 'The Siren' were good. 'The Madman' was not. We have too many stories about hair turning white overnight. Then, too, why should the fright have a worse effect on the caretaker than on the college boys? Psychologically, I think it should be the latter two who would receive the big scare.

"But that's enough. It's a peach of a magazine. I've been looking for something different for a long time, and here it is. I hope the magazine has a long and prosperous life. I'm boosting by passing on my copies to friends, and I've already got you at least one new regular reader."—One of the Bunch.

That last paragraph removes all the sting from the preceding ones. If every reader of WEIRD TALES obtained one more regular reader, as "One of the Bunch" has done, what a grand and glorious thing that would be for Ed!

WE honestly wish we could show you some more disparaging letters, for we really are keenly interested in them, but the fact is those are the only two we have. So, at the risk of boring you further, we'll run a few more of the other sort. We've dozens of these:

"Edwin Baird, Esq., Editor WEIRD TALES: I have just finished a first, and much interested, reading of your magazine—the May number. From your reprint of Bulwer Lytton's 'The House and the Brain,' I hope that you are intending to include in each number some such well-known and first-quality story. It would be a pleasure to find among your pages old favorites like 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,' from a level as high as Lytton's, or even one of the 'spookier' Sherlock Holmes adventures, such as that of 'The Speckled Band.'

"But my main reason for writing, aside from the obviously appropriate congratulations on your new venture and its undoubted success, is the hope of being able to persuade you to print a story I once read, called 'The Upper Berth.' Although the story was read several years ago, the impression has remained amazingly, almost unpleasantly, vivid. Going entirely beyond the pleasurably 'creepy' feeling, for unadulterated, unforgettable fear, I have never read anything to surpass 'The Upper Berth.' It is not a classic, like 'The House and the Brain,' but is briefly and efficiently written, to produce the effect for which it aims—a state of mind bordering on panic!

"Unfortunately, I cannot remember the author's name. I read the story in small book form, of about the size and length of 'Pigs is Pigs.' With the resources at your disposal, you could, I am sure, trace the story, in spite of its obscurity, and I think you would find your efforts in hunting and printing it well worth while. As a connoisseur yourself, you will appreciate its power of suggestion, as in Kipling's 'At the End of the Passage.'

"Wishing you all further success, I remain

"Yours very truly,

Agnes E. Burchard,

"2517 West Sixth Street,

"Los Angeles, Cal."

Contrasting Miss Burchard's letter with that of H. M., we'll say it's a blessing that all of us don't like the same things. It would be a mighty dull world if we did! We'll look into the matter of "The Upper Berth," and quite likely we shall reprint it in our department, "Masterpieces of Weird Fiction." We remember reading the story, long ago, but for the life of us we can't remember who wrote it, or who published it, or anything else about it. Perhaps some of our sharpshooters can aid us in finding it.

Snapshot criticisms of some of our recent stories are contained in a letter from Mrs. Frances Miller, 1893 East Fifty-ninth Street, Cleveland:

"My dear Mr. Baird: I happened to get hold of your first issue of WEIRD TALES, and after reading it I determined to try the next one. I am alone until midnight, and I surely do get a thrill out of your hair-raising stories. I have just finished the April number and am going to get the next as soon as it is out.

"'The Ghoul and the Corpse' in the first number gave me something to think about for several days. 'The Place of Madness' was intensely interesting, and for 'creepiness' and genuine horror, 'The Grave' and one that I cannot recall except that it concerned two sisters who were left alone, cannot be beat.

"I looked forward to reading 'The Square of Canvas,' but it didn't end just to my liking, although it is powerfully written and held my interest all the way through.

"'The Thing of a Thousand Shapes' was so 'spooky' that I didn't read it at night. I liked it very much, especially the last installment. 'The Forty Jars' is something to my taste. I am very fond of Chinese stories, or in fact anything that has to do with the Orient."

We recently had something to say on this page about the amazing similarity of stories written by dissimilar people, and Miss Zahrah E. Preble, 12 West Seventy-seventh Street, New York, read those remarks and sent us a neat solution of the mystery:

"Dear Mr. Baird: I was particularly interested in what you had to say about the sameness of the manuscripts you have to read.

"Perhaps this will offer at least a partial explanation. All the stories are attempting to portray a mysterious or weird happening. Did you ever think about the tone of voice people invariably use when they begin to tell you about such things? It immediately takes on a quality which indicates the abnormal theme they are going to give you. That tone of voice unconsciously colors the very words which are used, whether written or spoken, and so we find that diverse stories told to achieve the same effect will be told in the same tone quality.

"Another reason is that the human brain will respond to repetition of ideas just so many times before becoming half-hypnotized. After singing through a dozen songs, no matter how different they may be, I find that my sense of hearing is so drugged by sound that the freshness of perception is worn off, and so the songs all appear alike. Also, when typing for several hours in succession, the sound of the machine drugs my senses, and I find it hard to follow the sense of the words I am copying, although I try to keep alert, so as to make alterations as I copy.

"This may help you to solve the problem. Anyway, I have enjoyed WEIRD TALES, and as I have taken them in small doses, with sufficient intervals between, they strike fresh each time, so are more enjoyable."

WE had intended to end The Eyrie this month with some further comments, such as they are, on our adventures with weird manuscripts; but the vox poppers have consumed so much of our valuable space that we'll have to put it off.

Besides, if you'll pardon our saying so, it's a blazing hot afternoon in mid-July, and a darned good day for putting things off!

THE EDITOR.

Woman and Girl Fight Bloody Duel

FOR some time there had been whispered rumors in the towns of Rush and Industry near Rochester, N. Y. regarding the alleged domestic difficulties of Dr. and Mrs. Rider Wheelock of Industry. The trouble is said to have had its inception when Miss Mabel Grant, twenty-two years old, of Waverly, N. Y., moved into the Wheelock home to act as a nurse and housekeeper.

It is reported that Miss Grant is an exceedingly comely girl and that Mrs. Wheelock demanded her discharge in the early winter, but the girl remained.

The tongues of busy gossips were set to wagging at both ends when a startling rumor was confirmed by glaring headlines in the leading newspapers, stating that the woman, who is 60 years of age, had fought a bloody duel with the girl. The reports stated that the duel lasted for more than half an hour, and only terminated when the contestants grew so exhausted that neither could hold her sword. Mrs. Wheelock is said to have been badly cut about the hands and chest and to have been removed to a hospital for treatment. Miss Grant was taken to the office of a local physician, where her hands, arms and head were found to be painfully cut and lacerated.

Quite frequently the papers contain reports of duels fought by two men for the love of a woman, but a similar duel fought by two women for the love of a man is unique in the annals of modern journalism.

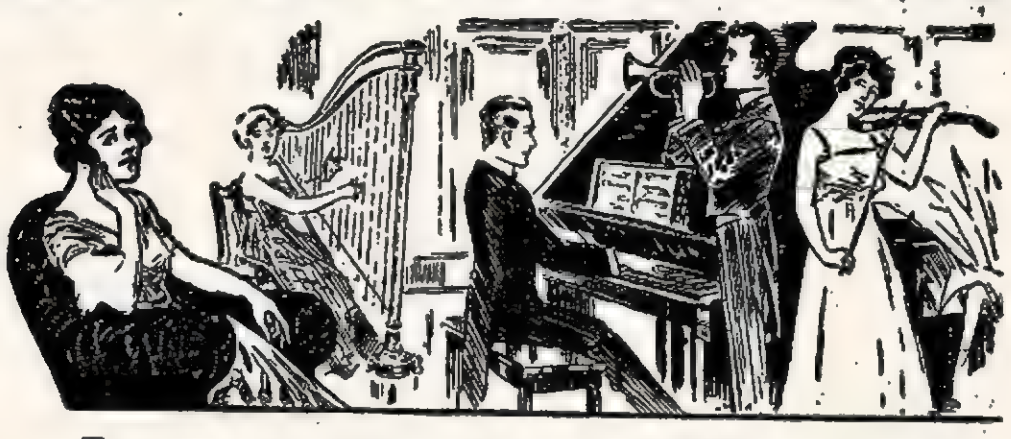
Spirit Objects To Holding Hands

THE SECOND of two seances held for the purpose of carrying out the conditions of the prize of $5,000, offered by the Scientific American for genuine materialization phenomena, is alleged to have brought out a unique and interesting fact in the realm of psychic investigation.

George Valentine, of Wilkes-Barre, Pa., was the medium and was accompanied by his friend, Richard Worrell. The investigators were Dr. Walter F. Prince, Chief Investigator for the American Society for Psychical Research, J. Malcolm Bird, of the Scientific American, and Dr. Hereward Carrington, of the American Psychical Institute.

The first phenomena observed at the seance were "Spirit Lights" of phosphorescent appearance which faded to a dull red hue before disappearing. Then Mr. Bird was touched by someone or something on the knee, hand and head. A trumpet moved mysteriously from sitter to sitter, bestowing ghostly caresses. When it nudged the magazine editor he reached for the hand of the alleged spirit and was promptly rewarded for his temerity by a blow from the trumpet that nearly broke his glasses. When the ensuing confusion had subsided it was found that the ghostly visitant had fled in a huff, and could not be persuaded to return. All of which goes to show that this spirit, at least, objected to having its hand held.

Don't Be a Wall Flower



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VOODOOISM

(Continued from page 56)

die tell me what you like to eat and I'll make you a good 'lil' dinner." But the downhearted Cambre only shook his head.

"I'll make you a gumbo file, like you ain't taste in yo life," she pleaded with him, trying to tempt him.

Finally Cambre assented. He ate the "gumbo file," and a few hours afterward lay dead in his cell, thus cheating the hangman's noose.

OTHER stories told of Marie tend to show that she was cunning, as well as charitable and wicked. One day a young man called at her door, asking alms. He was both ragged and hungry. For some time financial matters had not been going well with Marie, and she had no money. But an idea quickly came to her mind. She had the young man lie down upon a couch, and she placed a sheet over him. At his head and feet she placed lighted candles. Then, taking a tin cup in her hand, Marie sat on the doorstep, asking the passersby for money with which to defray the funeral expenses. Marie well knew the love of the average negro for the "wake." She soon had the cup full of money and running over. Entering the house, she quickly resurrected the "corpse," and with him divided the collection.

Did Marie Laveau possess supernatural powers? This question is still discussed in New Orleans by both whites and negroes. But the more enlightened people regard Marie as having been only a succesful impostor.

THE ROOM IN THE TOWER

(Continued from page 62)

Perhaps you can imagine my horror as I saw the figure gliding, creeping, toward me, its death-mask grinning as if with pleasure to find at last the room inhabited by a human—as I marked the eyeholes of doom, seeming to glow red in the firelit room, and the bony hand holding on high what I knew to be a cup of poison meant for me!

My eyes fell now on the other ghostly figures; they remained stationary, all turning toward the bed—and, as they raised their arms, I saw that every one held aloft a smoking goblet!

The sweat was now streaming from my every pore, and as the first ghastly figure came on with firm steps nearer to the bed on which I lay, I made absolutely sure that my last hour had struck, even that death would be preferable to the madness, the frenzy, that I felt running through every vein, to the terror of

knowing the unknown, of seeing those things usually unseen.

A cold breath emanated from the figure as it drew close to me, until I seemed to feel the very atmosphere of the tomb. I even longed for death!

Now the steam from the goblet wafted hot and heavy upon my face. I was going mad—*mad!*

AT THE other end of the room a deep-toned clock began sonorously to strike the hour of twelve. With a shriek of ungovernable fright—that sound of the striking of the hour breaking the spell that held me silent—I fell back unconscious upon the pillows, and knew nothing whatever until the dawn arrived.

With the morning the storm had passed, and I was aroused from my lethargy by the bright, cold rays of the winter sun.

And as I dressed and prepared once more to mingle with the people and the surroundings of bright reality, I made a vow never again to try and penetrate into that other world, remote, mysterious, beyond the grave! Never again to show even curiosity about the life of those spirits which inhabit that world; but to leave them to the companionship of other ghosts.

THE EVENING WOLVES

(Continued from page 75)

reality the Pool of Death. The roof dips down under the water, but formerly one who was determined could win to life and light through the pool. Now it may be that the way is closed—"

Monte staggered to his feet.

"You yellow devil!" he shrieked. "You mean that a man must try to find a way out under the water?"

Ah Wing bowed.

"Exactly, Mr. Monte Jerome. You will perceive that I myself am facing the same odds!"

He paused, staring down unwinkingly at his companion. From the direction of the pool came the sound of constant dripping. A fragment of masonry fell with a crash, and the passage shook.

"Ah," said the Chinaman suddenly, "I know the part you have played in this affair, you despoiler of the helpless! Let me tell you a true story. Years ago a Chinese boy was driven out by his countrymen because his eyes were gray. It was said that a devil lived in his body, and that he brought misfortune to all with whom he came into contact. No Chinaman would give him so much as a crust of bread—and no white man; for

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J. R. HEAD

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30x3½	4.75	6.75	1.05	33x4½	8.75	10.75	2.50
32x3½	5.50	7.75	1.30	34x4½	9.00	11.75	2.50
31x4	6.50	8.50	1.60	35x4½	9.75	12.00	2.75
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though his eyes were gray, his skin was yellow.

"Madam Celia took him in. She fed him and found him work. Years afterward he returned to repay his debt, and found that his benefactress had died—in penury and loneliness. He learned the names of the men who had robbed her—"

Monte Jerome began to laugh, his voice high pitched and strident. Then he paused, staring into the darkness of the upper passage.

"Who is there?" he cried. "Billy—Doc—"

His eyes seemed to focus on something that drew slowly nearer. His ashen lips moved, and he cried out a name.

"Madam Celia!" shrieked the wolf. "She's there behind you—she's pointing at me!"

He turned and ran blindly down the passage. His feet splashed into the edge of the pool, disturbing the layer of scum on its surface. Then, with a choking cry, he disappeared.

Ah Wing folded his arms and waited. For a time the surface of the Pool of Death was agitated, as if some creature of the depths were threshing about down there.

Then gradually it became peaceful; and as he looked a white face floated to the surface.

AH WING plunged into the pool without a moment's hesitation. He knew that no man could evade his destiny, and that if it was written in the stars for him to die a lingering death in Paris, he could not die in a well under Chinatown.

He struck out with all the power and precision of his strong body, diving down and down and at the same time driving himself forward. As he came toward the surface at last, his heart pounding and his lungs crying out for air, he felt the touch of masonry above him. The rough stones caught at his clothing and held him. His mind was losing its grip on the mechanism of his body. He must breathe—air—water—anything—

And then the barrier sloped steeply upward. With a mighty stroke, he drove himself toward the top of the pool. Still in utter darkness, he came up out of the water, drew a great strangling breath, and felt himself resting on the edge of a rocky margin.

The shadows of a foggy evening were descending over the city when Ah Wing appeared at the head of a narrow street leading toward the wharves and went swinging down it. He passed between rows of warehouses and approached a rotting peer, built out into the water.

Two people were standing there in the shadows of night; while, below, a trim sea-going power boat swung at her moorings. Ah Wing turned to one of the figures. It was that of Colonel Knight.

The Chinaman looked impersonally down upon the older man. When he spoke, his words came like the voice of an oracle.

"In your pocket," said he, "is a leather case containing what you imagine to be the Resurrection Pendant. As a matter of fact, the pendant has not been in your possession since you came out of your drugged sleep, in my house on the marshes. The trinket you have is valueless, and I have brought you here to see the end of this thing which has brought death to so many!"

Slowly he drew from an inner pocket a morocco case, which he opened. Into the night they flashed out like imprisoned fire—those matchless stones, which had the power to turn men into devils.

Ah Wing spread the wondrous creation upon his hand, and held it toward the crook who had paid so dearly for it. Then, with a sudden sweep of his arm, he sent the pendant far out over the darkening water.

"So—it is gone!" he said. "And now—"

But at last the man standing before him realized what was taking place. With a convulsive jerk, he drew forth a morocco box, the counterpart of the one from which Ah Wing had taken the jewels. Opening the case, he snatched up the replica.

"These—these—" he choked.

"A fairly clever imitation, Colonel Knight," commented Ah Wing. "But if your vision had not been failing, it would never have deceived you. And that brings us to the last point we have to discuss. Lim, kindly hold the Colonel till I have finished!"

Colonel Knight had turned toward the edge of the wharf, as if about to put an end to his misery.

"That way out is always at your disposal, Colonel," continued Ah Wing. "I doubt, however, if you will have the courage to use it after your excitement has worn off. I have discovered that your financial resources are exhausted. Once each month you will go to On Wong, the Chinese banker whose address I have written on this card. He will pay over to you twenty dollars, on which you will subsist. Your old companions have gone before you. Their sin was less black than yours; and for that reason I condemn you to live, instead of condemning you, as I did them, to die!"

He crossed to the edge of the platform and quickly let himself down to the deck of the cruiser.. Lim followed and for a moment the two stood looking up at the figure huddled on the wharf.

SIX MONTHS after this final scene in the affair of the Evening Wolves, Ah Wing received at his New York address a letter from On Wong, the banker. Several items of business were discussed, and then On Wong added this paragraph:

"You will be pleased to know, most worshipful Son of Heaven, that the pensioner to whom monthly I paid over in your name the sum of twenty dollars has passed on to the hell of his most honorable fathers. He died in great misery, crying out the name of one Madame Celia, Mother of the Friendless!"

THE END

The sun's heat is the cause of the wind. It shines for a time on a portion of the earth's surface and heats the air immediately beneath its rays. This air expands, and, thus becoming lighter, it rises, leaving a partial vacuum. When the surrounding air rushes in to fill the exhausted space, we say that the wind blows.

The most powerful poison in the world is a certain toxin produced by the germs which cause botulism, a peculiar kind of food poisoning. A single teaspoonful of this substance would be sufficient to kill all the people on the earth. Fortunately, this terrible potion is very difficult to obtain, and loses its efficacy when kept a short time.

THE CAULDRON

(Continued from page 86)

chair so that the top of the back was under the doorknob and felt sure that should anyone try to open it, the noise would awaken me.

I was soon in bed and asleep. To show that I was not in an imaginative state, I recall that my mind was principally impressed with the details of an invention about which I was journeying to Detroit to see the chief engineer of one of the big firms. I had no particular thought on any other subject, that I can remember.. I must have been asleep for quite a while, when I awoke suddenly and started up in bed.

Standing in the door, which was wide open, was the form of a woman. I could not distinguish the features, as the glimmer of light was behind her. I could only see that it was a tall woman with light hair. She stood very still with one arm raised, the other hanging limp at her side. Her dress or gown was of a light, almost transparent material. I tried to speak, but I think I succeeded in ejaculating "Oh!" or "Ah!" and the form vanished instantly.

Jumping out of bed I ran to the door and looked out. The hall was empty, the parlor was empty, no one was on the stairway, and the two men in the next room were evidently fast asleep. I went back to my room and closed the door. Then I thought of the chair. There it lay overturned on the floor; the noise of its falling having been the cause of my awakening. I sat down on the side of the bed and considered. By my watch I saw that it was twenty minutes past two. I must have been dreaming, I thought. That seemed the natural conclusion. And so I should think to this day were it not for the overturned chair and open door.

The thought that a sleep-walker might have entered my room was quickly dispelled. Had such been the case, I would have seen her somewhere in the hall as the time between the form's disappearance and my investigation was a matter of but a few moments.

Who the woman, or apparition, was, I have no idea, but should be inclined to think it was my wife, if anyone belonging to me at all, as we were devotedly attached to one another, and she had been dead for several years.

MATT. BYRNE AP'RHYS. C. E.

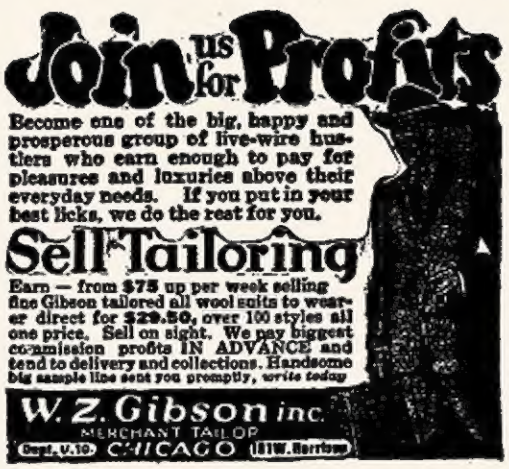
THE GUARD OF HONOR

(Continued from page 84)

he was resting comfortably, on the charred slats of that bed. All the rest had been in his mind merely; all the rest. . . .

He clapped his hands to his head as the last shred of memory came. He saw the house in flames. He was within it again, tearing his way through fire and suffocation, to rescue her. He was calling her name, desperately, hysterically, with a voice that rose to a shriek. Now he was flinging himself into the flames, to die by her side. He recognized this for the memory his mother had kept from him; but he possessed it only for that supreme moment. Then mercy intervened.

For he was young again. The mad, hot fire of youth coursed exultantly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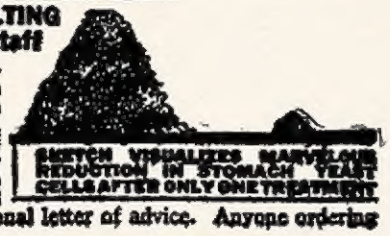

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through his veins. Before him, in the dusk, the lights of illusion twinkled in the windows of the mansion. Brown smoke twisted lazily upward from its chimney—the smoke of long ago. With a cry, he ran back. He knocked at the door.

Though his hand clutched at his heart, the action was instinctive. He was not aware. He knocked again, until the echoes, an eager, hurrying throng, danced up and down the hallways. He thundered once more, and, with the other hand, tore away his collar.

Within, light, lilting footsteps responded. Chains were loosened. A bolt shot back. The door opened.

He was content merely to stand motionless a moment, and look; but it was his soul which looked. For that part of him which had been old and forgetful, subject to time and disease, had fallen heavily across the threshold.

Death Held No Terror for Bernhardt

THE death of Mme. Sarah Bernhardt recalls her uncommon attitude toward the King of Terrors. Years ago, she made complete arrangements for her funeral and burial, and even went so far as to purchase the coffin in which she desired to be buried. For her final resting place she chose a wild spot on Belle Isle—an enormous pile of jagged rocks, reaching high into the air above the Atlantic Ocean and forming a natural monument.

Thirty years ago she bought a rosewood coffin and lined it with mauve satin, and announced that she would be buried in it. She often slept in the coffin, remarking, "Death must hold no terrors." Thus, the expression, "Sarah Bernhardt's Coffin," came to mean in Paris anything weird or uncanny.

Few people realize that there is a very important reason why tears are salty. Nature made them that way because of the fact that since all the fluids of the body are salty, and the tissues themselves contain salt, pure water would irritate the delicate membrane of the eye.

Aviators have sometimes asked why they cannot see the earth revolve when they are flying far above it. This is simply because the air with which the earth is surrounded revolves with it, carrying along the birds and anything else above our sphere. In order to escape this influence entirely, an aviator would have to rise to at least several hundred miles.

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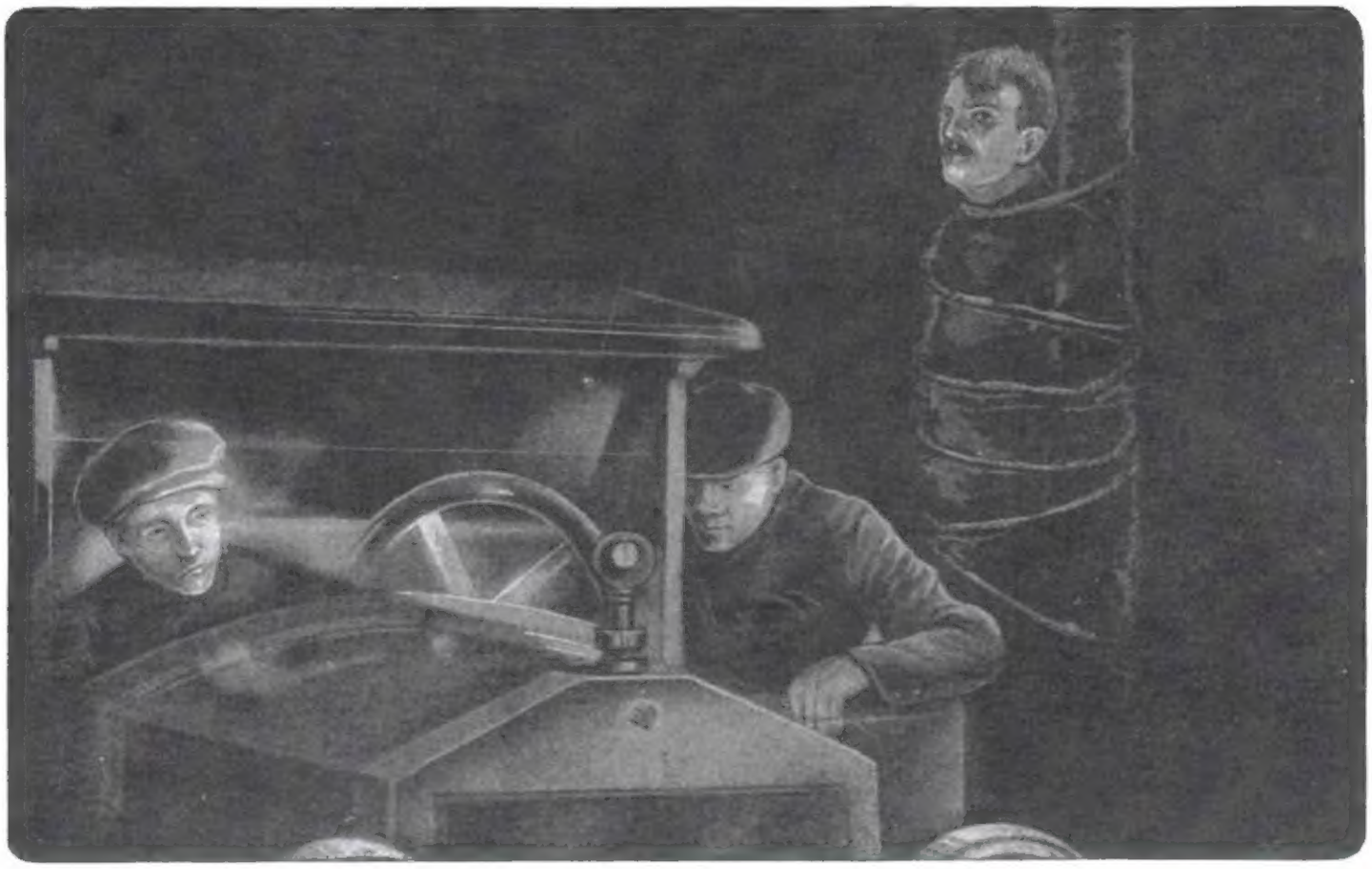

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